

THE SHOT



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Chapter I

MISS BENEDICTA WATKYN lived with her widowed brother-in-law, Francis Busshe, at Fir Bank, Daunt. Little old Daunt is a Thames Valley town. She kept house for him, shared expenses and looked after his only child. A daughter. Emily.

At half-past nine on a dull morning in the mid-April of 1920 Miss Watkyn sat down at the writing-table in one of the bow windows of the Fir Bank drawing-room and started a long letter to a married cousin in New Zealand. Miss Watkyn always spoke of herself (with reason) as an excellent correspondent. But this letter she was never to finish; and when, having left it with still a page to fill, she suddenly, in the evening of the same day, caught sight of the closely-covered sheet in the open blotting-book, she started back. Years, not hours, seemed to divide her from the letter.

Had something overwhelming happened in the interval? Yes.

In order to begin at the beginning we had better, while Miss Watkyn's pen yet runs, look over her shoulder.

DEAR META,

I have big news. In a fortnight Emmy will be married. She has been engaged three months. The young man is the son of a cousin of her father's, so a second cousin. Still, they only met lately. His name is Julian Demmean, he's twenty-seven (Emmy's nineteen), charming, absolutely devoted, and quite well off. He has taken a house nearby, wants headquarters near London, which is lucky, as Emmy could never have borne to go far from her father, and *he* is rooted at Fir Bank.

I give Emmy some of my old lace—a handsome present, my dear—and her adopted uncle, Mr. Grant, is having emeralds of his mother's re-set for her. It's the house next his Julian has taken on a long lease—Como—Mr. Grant is the owner both of Como and his own house, Rufus Lodge. He wouldn't

have let Como to just anybody, the young people are lucky to get it.

Julian Demmean has no relations who count, except a twin brother; Julian contrived to be born first, fortunately; it mattered a lot, as the Demmean property is entailed on the eldest son. The brother, Edward, has written nicely to Emmy. Julian is very fond of him. He's still serving abroad, in Mesopotamia, a captain in the regulars—Garrison Artillery.

Everybody seems to have met everybody else during the war—our dear and valued doctor (Dr. Pinney), though fifty-nine, *insisted* on being sent East in 1917; he knows those parts and peoples well, and thought he might be useful. The dear man was invalided home in six months, but while away he made friends with Captain Demmean and speaks quite affectionately of him.

I'm so glad there'll be no mother or sister-in-law. I think——

As these last words were written, there came a tap at the door, which was only a form, for even as he tapped John Grant walked in.

Six foot two. As spare as a wolf-hound and

as strong. Forty. A long, thin face with a decided outline to it. The eyes are thoughtful and keen. The mouth is determined, severe at times, perhaps. The corners have a downward turn.

Good appropriate dress. All the details well seen to.

John Grant was the only friend Francis Busshe had in the world. They had met in their college days and obeying (one may guess) the law of opposites blending formed the closest intimacy. Busshe married when he was only twenty-one. That made no difference in the friendship. He settled at Daunt, where John Grant was living with his father. John did certainly refuse to be godfather to the baby, but when at the age of two little Emmy lost her mother, he developed a special interest in the creature; taught her, as time went on, the piano and singing, Miss Watkyn doing the rest, for cash was scarce at Fir Bank. Poor dear Francis Busshe, always staring nearsightedly into metaphysical works and planning one which was to top the lot, had been pulled up by Grant just on the brink of beg-

gary. Grant ever after managed his friend's money affairs for him.

He himself didn't care about metaphysics. He liked astronomy, music was his passion, pistol-shooting his hobby.

He got endlessly talked about at Daunt. Perhaps the reason was this. He impressed people somehow as a man who might accomplish anything, almost; yet his record was nil. What was star-gazing? What organ-playing? What popping at a mark? Pooh—said his neighbours—Grant is an idler. (He had some money.) Yet looks—what *does* he look like? Like a Prime Minister of the old days before golf came in. That was one suggestion.

However, from 1914 to 1918 the Daunt idler had fought hard in France.

When on this memorable April morning he appeared in the Fir Bank drawing-room, Miss Watkyn jumped up from her letter rather nervously.

“So Emmy's gone out already,” he said.

“Did you want her?”

“Her emeralds have just come back from the jeweller, and I've brought them round.”

Miss Watkyn re-seated herself.

"May I open it?" she said.

"Do."

She opened, gazed, gloated.

"Emmy's a lucky girl," she said.

He replied, "That setting seems to me all right."

He sat down. There was a short silence. The window was wide open. Emmy, leaning out of it, had eaten a coconut ice bar; and two or three sparrows were quarrelling over some sweet crumbs on the sill. Suddenly they flew off and then it was quite still. No air stirring.

"Where has Emmy gone?" said Grant. He was in general the least curious of men, but always liked to be well posted in the affairs of his young favourite.

"She's having three good frocks besides the wedding one," said Miss Watkyn solemnly, "and *they* come from town. Rose Swanell is making the rest. Emmy's just run over for a fitting."

Grant leaned back in his chair and stretched out his long legs.

"How did the dinner at Dr. Pinney's go off last night?" he enquired.

Miss Watkyn looked stern.

"It was a pity you couldn't come. I wished for you," she said.

"Thanks very much. Why?"

"There were only the Vicar and the sister and nieces who are staying with him besides Julian Demmean and Emmy and me—Frank didn't go, of course—and after dinner Julian took it into his head to give an imitation of a cinema performance, but another man was wanted, so—would you believe it?—he sent for the Ransoms. I thought if you'd been there *you* might have acted."

"I can't act."

"Can't you? But perhaps you'd have made a remark which would have brought Julian to his senses."

"What's the matter with the Ransoms?"

"Surely you know that Maurice Ransom was Julian's valet. He insinuates that he had secretarial work to do, but I know for certain that he began life as Julian's valet—neither more nor less. Julian and Edward Demmean lost their parents very early and their maternal grandmother brought them up at her place in the North. Maurice Ransom was the son of

her valued butler. He alludes to having played with Julian as a child. That's how. The grandmother's butler's little son. Well! If you think him and his wife fit company for Emmy, who's both a Busshe and a Watkyn—I don't."

She paused a moment. Grant seemed a trifle absent-minded. "And now he's set up as a photographer," Miss Watkyn went on. "It's a rise. But does one mix with one's photographer?"

"Hasn't the War made these distinctions seem rather faded?" Grant in his turn inquired.

Miss Watkyn had learnt nothing during the War except how to tear bandages and light a fire without wood. So she only jerked her chin up and said:

"Do *you* admire Mrs. Maurice Ransom? You've seen her, of course."

"Oh, yes." Here Grant enigmatically smiled. "She's a stunner," he said. "Well! did they give a good show between them?"

"Emmy and Julian were first-rate, Maurice Ransom pretty fair, his wife and the Vicar's niece were poor, I thought. Mrs. Pinney in-

sisted on having a tray before we left. It *was* late. The Ransoms stayed on, of course."

"If, when Emmy's married," mused Grant, "she has nothing worse to put up with than swallowing cakes and wine alongside of the Ransoms, I don't mind much."

Miss Watkyn had an excited movement.

"You don't believe she'll be happy? You dislike Julian Demmean?"

Grant looked at her as if in surprise.

"I was thinking of matrimony in general," he said. Again, the faint but markedly sardonic smile with which he had spoken of Maurice Ransom's wife appeared on his face. "One has heard so much about its risks," he reminded Miss Watkyn.

"But when love is what theirs is," she protested, "Oh—I do call it a bright look-out. Dr. Pinney was chaffing them last night. He said, 'what would become of you two if you were parted for a day?' Guess what Emmy replied."

Grant shook his head.

"She said, 'We'll try the experiment. Do you hear, Julian? To-morrow we won't meet.' And they're sticking to it."

"They don't mean to meet to-day?"

"Emmy's fancy, you know. A joke with Dr. Pinney."

Grant's eyes were turned towards the window.

"Here comes our gentleman," he said.

"Who?"

"Maurice Ransom carrying something big."

Miss Watkyn jerked forward.

"Oh, how funny!" she called out. "He told us he has had his best photo of Julian enlarged and copied on porcelain as a wedding present for Emmy. It's tinted too. And here he's bringing it just on top of your emeralds. If he comes up, do stop till he's gone. He bothers me. Do."

Grant said "All right."

And Maurice Ransom, with his wedding present in his arms, did come up.

Maurice is a neatly made man of twenty-seven; medium height; hair and eyes dark. Rather good-looking.

He is too clever to be deferential with his superiors in station. Pleasant. That is his line. If only he were natural! But when anxious to produce a good impression he never is—quite.

Maurice had not left England during the War. No stigma attaches to him on that account. The examining doctors detected slight heart weakness—very slight it was—but as he was good at chemicals the authorities decided to use him in a bomb factory, and he proved invaluable.

So much for Maurice Ransom.

Miss Watkyn received him with stiff courtesy.

He didn't appear to notice the stiffness. He said he must apologize for disturbing her in the morning, but he'd felt he would like to hand the portrait over himself.

It was done up in Japanese paper under brown paper. Grant asked to see it. Maurice undid his offering and placed it on a chair, carefully choosing a favourable light.

A head and shoulders study. Julian Demean was twenty-seven; here he appeared younger; even as he did in reality. Brown hair waved back from a smooth, clear forehead; the face, looking straight out from the picture, had an air of uncommon beauty, though the features were by no means altogether symmetrical.

The living gaze was almost disquieting; the eyes seemed to meet your glance boldly and yet at the same moment to elude it. Just as Julian's eyes often did. The mouth was like a child's: very attractive.

Grant was struck. "That's good," he said.

Miss Watkyn forgot to keep up her formal tone.

"Wonderful!" she exclaimed.

Maurice smiled demurely and said, "I am glad to have satisfied two connoisseurs."

"I'm not a connoisseur," said Miss Watkyn.

Grant said nothing. He kept his eyes on the portrait. In a few minutes Maurice bowed himself out, leaving with Miss Watkyn a well thought out message for her niece. And then the aunt remarked to Grant that Emmy would certainly be gone an hour—perhaps two. What about the emeralds? Should she take them up to her room? He wasn't the least wrapped up in his wedding present. "As you please," he said. Miss Watkyn departed on her self-imposed errand. Grant lingered on. He was as one of the family, had a latch-key, came and went at his pleasure and Francis Busshe depended on him for everything. A nail could

hardly be driven on the premises (if Busshe knew of it) without Grant's being consulted.

He returned to his survey of the portrait. Searchingly he viewed it. Gaily, confidently, it viewed him. And yet—What was it upset the surface impression of mere careless charm? Perhaps Grant wanted to find out. Something there was. And so the sharp, grave eyes bored, as it were, into the gay, tantalizing ones; minute followed minute; still Grant stood there; till he heard Miss Watkyn's heavy foot on the stairs; he was out of the drawing-room before she re-entered it. He had already seen Frank Busshe breakfasting in bed.

Chapter II

HE left the house. A queer little house it is. Old and grey, gauntly, oddly dignified, Fir Bank presents almost flush with the high road its windows, fat bows on the first and second stories, thin slits above. Just now, in the morsel of front garden, white-flowering lilac bushes veil the mouldy villa as if in youth.

The Daunt highway from London takes here the name of Church Road. On the Fir Bank side the asphalted footpath turns and leads you in two minutes down to the Thames. The opposite footpath terminates at the Old Daunt churchyard gate, with the vicarage garden gate close by. Parallel to Church Road runs Regent's Road, and these two, with the river-front as a base, enclose a triangular island-like space piled up hugger-mugger with dwellings, gardens, workshops, hidden entries, unexpected issues, wilful greenery. In the fine season this corner bit of Old Daunt is a gay sight.

Directly opposite to Fir Bank a long alley crosses the island (as I call it) about in the middle.

And down this alley went John Grant. To his left rises a wall, to his right first the back yard of a Wesleyan Chapel puts in a nippy claim to attention; then come flourishing allotments backed by three old cottages, humble but not wretched. Meanwhile the wall to the left terminates and the back gardens appear of sundry more modern better-sized cottages which face Regent's Road. In the first of these, the one at the corner as you leave the alley, lives Emmy Busshe's little dressmaker, Rose Swanell, and her mother. Their story is essential to the understanding of my story and must be told in brief.

John Grant's father, a thriving silk-merchant, when he first came to Rufus Lodge, Daunt, engaged as gardener a man called Swanell. He was mild, quiet, a bit melancholy. His wife, Leah, a handsome, clever, unreliable young woman, had had a full-blooded gipsy for her mother.

The Swanell pair lived in the same cottage where Rose now was. Two sons and two

daughters came to them. The eldest son was in these days indoor man to John Grant; his wife reigned in the kitchen. Neither he nor his sisters took after Leah; but in the youngest son the gipsy strain came out, as if angrily. The fact that he was Leah's spoilt darling helped him to his ruin. At eighteen he was convicted of having a share in a robbery at a neighbouring farm. The first few months of his sentence did for him; he died of slow fever in the prison infirmary; it was the confinement. His mother was never herself again after his death.

The elder daughter lived at home.

Rose went at sixteen as maid to a widowed aunt of John Grant's, his father's sister. She lived at Como, the house next Rufus Lodge. At past forty she had married a destitute Italian Count; he led his middle-aged Contessa an awful life, made a big hole in her property and his own health, and then, at the end of six years, died gracefully.

His victim said with truth that her nerves were shattered; yet when she came to Daunt she changed the name of her house there to Como, in memory of her honeymoon. In Daunt,

being its only titled female, she was usually known as the Countess—or rather, she wasn't known. She saw no one. Emmy Busshe, however, a child of five, was encouraged to run in, and so the Countess had for society little Emmy and young Rose and her nephew, landlord and next door neighbour, John Grant.

Rose was not treated like a servant. The Countess couldn't get on without her—no—not for an hour. She was always either scolding the girl or making a fuss of her. Rose took it all calmly. Ten years at Como brought her to twenty-six. Then the elder Swanell girl married, and the father died; Rose having promised him first to make a home for Leah.

A thankless task. Sorrow and gin had wrought hard with Leah Swanell; she would be away sometimes for weeks together, fore-gathering with tramping relatives of her mother's. Her returns were sudden and silent, as were her departures. Swanell loved her to the last. During her absences he always kept a light burning at night in his bedroom window as a sign for the strayaway. He charged Rose to continue the custom.

The Countess's imaginary maladies gave

place to a real one. After her death Como stood empty till, in 1914, John Grant threw it open to two noble Belgian families; they had but lately left when Julian Demmean took the place.

As for Rose's means of support, Grant allowed the mother a small pension, the girl's dressmaking did the rest.

Well, just as Grant was about to pass the Swanell back-garden side gate, a feeble, ramshackle little concern in a low hedge, the sun, for the first time that day, broke forth. Almost simultaneously the Swanell back door flew open, and out from it ran Emmy Busshe, pulling with her Rose, reluctant but unequal to resistance.

Emmy. Though she was nineteen her figure was only a sketch as yet, not frail, however; there was breadth across the shoulders, depth in the chest. With its slightly too prominent mouth and marked nose, the face could easily be found fault with, but charming it was; striking; the splendid hazel eyes were fire-bright; the blood showed under the skin like grape-juice in a grape; life, young life, in every lineament was restlessly up; her position as

bride-elect to a man she adored put the last touch on all this stir and glow; the whole being triumphed unconsciously.

Still linked with Rose Swanell she reached the little hedge, and across it greeted Grant. He had pulled up.

“Good morning,” he said. He smiled, and with this smile, quiet though it was, his face changed so pleasantly you would hardly have known him for the man you have seen hitherto.

“Where are you going?” Emmy inquisitorially inquired.

“To a sale at Cotterell.” Cotterell is a mainly agricultural district, still surviving, about a mile and a half south-east of Daunt. “I want to pick up a mowing machine.”

He turned his gaze towards the elder young woman. “How is Rose?” he said to her, gently, respectfully.

“Quite well, thank you,” she replied. Her voice was low.

What is Rose like? Thirty years old now, shortish, slim; a sallow face with features which are delicate but far from weak; no suggestion of the gipsy about her, unless the extremely intelligent look in her eyes when she lifts them

be taken as such. She dresses soberly. Miss Watkyn doesn't object to the intimacy her niece keeps up with the little dressmaker because, though Emmy ignores the class difference, Rose is ever careful to mark her sense of it.

"Rose is *not* quite well," Emmy declared. "Mrs. Swanell came back last night between one and two, and Rose got no sleep."

This time Leah had only been away a week. She vanished seldomer and returned sooner than formerly. Her years began to tell.

"It didn't matter," Rose murmured.

"I'm going to ask Mrs. Swanell to do a prophecy for me," Emmy cried out. "About my married life, you know."

"Miss Emmy!"

"What, Rose?"

"Please, miss, don't make a joke of my mother's gift."

"Why, Rose!" said Grant, looking at her with an interested air. "Do you believe in second sight?"

"All I know is I'm thankful the state takes mother so seldom," she said, without return-

ing his look. "I think it's terrible when holes come in the curtain."

"The curtain which divides us from the future?" said Grant. "Well, I'm a sceptic. Mrs. Swanell has never prophesied to *me*."

"I'll prophesy to you then," said Emmy. (At the same time she gave Rose's hand an affectionate squeeze.) "I prophesy that on the 29th instant" (the date fixed for her wedding), "dad won't find himself equal to giving me away. If I prove right—Granty, will *you* do it?"

"No," he replied.

"You won't?"

"No, Eaglet."

Why Eaglet? If Emmy had been a boy, Francis Busshe would have called the boy Hegel. I am told the German metaphysicians have been relegated to obscurity. So perhaps I had better mention that Hegel was a giant one. Emmy turned out a girl. But Busshe said her second name must be Hegel, and it was. The child's nurse, seeing Hegel written down one day, ever after pronounced it Eagle.

"And what's your name, darling?"

"Come, Miss, speak up. Say Emily Eagle Busshe."

This amused the parents, and in her own home baby Emmy was called Eaglet. It was still her father's name for her. And Grant used it now and then.

"The Eaglet's wings are growing," Emmy with a gay smile informed him. "It will soon leave the nest."

She stepped back and gave in one instant a wonderfully vivid suggestion of a bird flying, but in order to stretch and wave her arms like pinions she had to drop Rose's hand. Rose slipped away; went in.

"There goes a good girl," said Grant. "Is the mother indoors?"

"No. She had her pipe and her tea and went out before I came over." And now Emmy looked with a conscious sort of intrepidity at Grant, and abruptly delivered herself of the thing she had come out to say. As she spoke she changed colour a little; it was hardly a blush.

"Have you seen Julian this morning?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"We'd agreed to have a bit of pistol practice before breakfast—a match."

"You didn't beat!"

"Very well."

"You did?"

"I did."

"I hate him to be beaten."

"Nonsense."

"Why is he so fond of it?"

"Why am I?"

"He is a good shot?"

"Quite good. Only I've had more practice."

She seemed satisfied. "We're parted," she said. "Did he tell you?"

"Miss Watkyn did."

"Blessed Benny. Yes, we're parted for twenty-four hours."

"How are you getting on?"

"First-rate," she said darting a mischievous look. "Tell Dr. Pinney so if you meet him." A pause. "How is Julian getting on?" she said.

"Couldn't undertake to report."

"Did you breakfast together?"

"No. By the by he mentioned he'd be writing letters all the morning."

"He said that was what he meant to do."

"While you try on dresses."

She nodded.

She leaned further over the hedge.

Breaking a twig from it she looked sweetly at Grant. "So you really mean," she said, "that if dad fails me you won't give me away?"

"I mean it. But dad shan't fail you. I promise you that."

"Very well. Or—Benny might do. I must have one of you," she said slowly. "Don't you remember the poem I wrote when I was six, about you three people? My one poem."

He pretended he didn't remember because he wanted to hear her say it. Emmy recited:

I'm not alone,
I've darling Frank
Who's a regular crank
And Benny and Granty,
Benny's my aunty,
And Granty's my own.

Grant stood looking at her.

"I'd heard the housemaid call dad a crank," she said, "and I thought it meant something grand. About as good as a baronet."

She laughed; it was a bursting bubbling al-

most soundless laugh; she threw her head back, her white teeth flashed.

Possessed by sensations which were new to her; saying she scarcely knew what; her love-absorption now hiding, now peeping out, she let herself go for a minute or two in this laugh; she seemed like a cup filled too full when it gets a tilt; a musical instrument tuned above concert pitch, or, as her head went back, and the sunlight beamed into her eyes, truly the bird she had enacted, rising, rejoicing, staring unabashed at the sun.

All Saints' Alley (named from the Daunt parish church), was little used. At this moment, the cottage children being at school, not a soul showed up or down save Grant and Emmy; with the hedge rising to her bosom he saw her; there were greenest green fruit-trees in Rose's little garden; the back of the big church in which she was to be married dominated the scene. A pale cast had come over the sunshine.

She still laughed uncontrollably.

"I'll lose my mowing-machine," Grant said; lifted his peaked tweed cap and walked off.

She called after him in mere idleness, follow-

ing with her eyes the lean vigorous figure. Either he didn't hear or didn't chose to. Gone; gone with his long strides.

Rose was at Emmy's side again. "Dear duck! isn't he a dear duck?" Emmy said.

Rose said nothing.

"Isn't he?" Emmy repeated impatiently.

Rose stooped right down; she pulled at the strap of her open shoe.

"Mr. Grant is a true gentleman," she said, as she came upright again.

"Oh you parcel of pins!" Emmy seized Rose and kissed her. "There! I'm pricked! I am!" The church clock began striking ten. "Time! time!" the madcap cried. "We've none to waste."

With the fifth stroke they were in the cottage. The pale sunshine faded altogether.

Chapter III

THE Watkyn nose is a long aquiline with a bump in the centre of the bridge. Benedicta loved to see hers in the glass not from vanity, but because it said so plainly, "Come what may you are one of the Watkyns of Shropshire."

This morning, while putting on her hat, she viewed the important feature with special complacency. Then sallied forth. She carried in her coat pocket a recipe for making pineapple jelly out of turnips which she had promised the night before to Mrs. Pinney.

She crossed the road. Down All Saints' Alley she sent a glance as she passed it on the left. No sign of life there. The Wesleyan Chapel and the boat-builders' yard next to it went unheeded. Sticking itself up with ugly, and at this quiet moment enigmatical insistency, the lofty signal board with Dangerous Corner in huge letters on it offended, as usual,

her eye. She marched on to the Triangle. This is an open space which in a French country town would certainly be converted into a *Place*. The main road spreads out here to receive Regent's Road and another at right angles to it, Argyle Avenue.

To the right of the Triangle, as you face London, smirks the smart little Roebuck Hotel, built on the site of an old inn of the same name. Beside it, the garden touching the Roebuck grounds, a small red house, compact, cosy-looking, bears on its gate a brass plate with the inscription—Maurice Ransom. All Saints' Photographic Studio.

After having sped across the Triangle, Miss Watkyn was exactly on a level with the All Saints' Photographic Studio on the other side of the way. She favoured the premises with a long stare. Nothing would convince her that the wave in Mrs. Maurice Ransom's hair was natural; and she never passed without hoping to catch a glimpse of her, taking curls out of pins. But the little house, looking out on Dangerous Corner, showed nothing. The ground floor window-boxes were full of wall-flowers.

From this point stretches Daunt Road proper, and it pursues for three-quarters of a mile a steady river-like course, bearing on its banks, so to speak, only oldish houses standing in their own grounds.

All these houses are alike in having an air of repose and good breeding about them; but they were raised at varying dates, mostly by intending owners; no mere builder's taste has been consulted here; each habitation bears a stamp of its own.

First comes Como. Seclusion is not aimed at. Passers by are free to view the long, pretty house, low for its length, built of brownish brick; the entrance-door, the veranda, the window-frames are green. How open-looking is this many-windowed front with its two wings! The house seems to promise hospitality. From the flower beds tulips smile and beckon. The trees fall away on either side.

Julian Demmean was living here, with only a bachelor's scratch establishment. To Miss Watkyn fell the task of collecting proper servants against the return of the young pair from their honeymoon. Her brow was heavy with the thought of servants as she skirted Como's

garden palings. But she was roused by the sight of some one entering at the gate. Some one who had been walking in the same direction as herself but on the opposite side of the way; and now the figure crossed, and went in through the gate of Como, while Miss Watkyn was still three or four minutes off it.

A female. Not the least remarkable-looking. But curiosity was a leading trait in Miss Watkyn's character. And though she had lately taken to reading-spectacles, she retained, for objects sufficiently removed, the eye of a hawk. That eye eagerly swept the stranger.

A lady—a sort of a one, anyhow. Quite middle-aged or almost elderly. The figure stodgy. The walk suggested tender feet. A brown skirt, a long black satin coat, a green hat with black plumes and black lace veil, a mauve scarf; the toilette was shabby and inharmonious; but each article had in its day been good.

The lady carried a little red plush bag. Her manner as she closed the gate of Como behind her was at once anxious and determined; and Miss Watkyn, getting a good sight of her back as she herself went by the gate, decided that Julian Demmean's morning caller was a col-

lector for some charity. "Well, she'll find an easy prey in Julian."

Now comes Rufus Lodge, John Grant's abode and his father's before him. What a contrast to Como! Trees grow right down to the gate; in this season of light foliage the house can be described; later it will be hidden as in a wood. It is red brick; but old, old red brick; giving out hues, dark, deep, rich, ripe, fading, dead; the structure is square, regular; formal yet rustic. The ivied windows, the entrance-door with its spacious porch, have a brooding, guarded look. The beautiful garden lies at the back.

Miss Watkyn's thoughts change. "Emmy has always been such an interest for John Grant. I hope when she's married *he* won't marry. Whatever should I do with poor Frank Busshe if he *did*?"

Thus ruminating she passes out of sight; and we let her go, and enter the roomy but darkish kitchen of Rufus Lodge. It has a low ceiling and the windows are too small.

At the table a girl was stoning raisins while the wife of Leah Swanell's eldest son, a quick-

eyed, plump, smooth-skinned person, nearing forty, rummaged in a cupboard.

Her husband, Alfred Swanell, came in. Small, thin, unhealthy-looking.

“Lottie—the old lady’s back.”

The wife shut the cupboard door.

“How do you know?”

“Why, she came and knocked at the side door. She’s in our room. Talking very queer.”

“Not been to the *Bunch of Grapes*——”

“No, she’s perfectly sober. Can’t you come? She makes my head ache.”

Lottie went with him.

The housekeeper’s room was small but extremely comfortable. A clear fire burned in the grate. The master having gone out, Swanell had been sitting over it with the morning’s *Times* when his mother disturbed him. In the fireside corner stood a fine old high-backed arm-chair, much knocked about; yet it gave an air to the room.

Bolt upright in this chair, with a stick leaning beside her, sat Leah Swanell. It was easy to see how handsome she had been. The face was now like a cameo cut in lava; so dark

from exposure; the cameo had an ivory setting; bands of yellow-white hair drooping round it. The front teeth were still perfect; the eyes, retreated into hollows, had a topaz gleam. The thinness of the face was terrible; the skin seemed almost too tight on the jaws to let them move.

The fine proportions of Leah's wasted figure made her costume appear dignified; it consisted of a black stiff gown, a grey cloak, and a dirty old soft felt hat with a clean spotted silk handkerchief tied over it.

An indescribably quick glance was her only reply to Lottie Swanell's loud "Good morning, mother." But when her daughter-in-law produced a bottle of home-brewed anisette she grew more civil.

"Your health," she said. The fiery liqueur was gone at a gulp.

"I'll take another glass," she said.

"Better not, mother," warned her son. He signed to his wife to lock the bottle up again in the wall-press. She didn't do so, however. "As you please," said Leah scornfully.

She leaned forward, warming her hands at the fire, and was silent a minute or two. Then

looked up. "So little Emmy Busshe's wedding is on the twenty-ninth," she said. "She's grown a fine girl, and has a handsome young man. Ah! don't I remember when she was three, I stood by the All Saints' church gate one Sunday morning to hear the bells clamour, and over the road she flew, bare curls and a white frock, and her hand went into mine. 'I like the bells,' she said, and when they'd done, and I took her over to Fir Bank, the nurse, who'd never missed her, told me the child was clean mad on the bells; well, well!—they'll start going on the twenty-ninth; and I'll be there, little Emmy, I'll watch you up to the altar." Abruptly changing her tone, "Another glass of your stuff, Lottie Swanell," she said. Careless of her husband's disapproval, Lottie re-filled the old woman's glass.

Gone again at one jerk. And then Leah grew drowsy. She leaned back in the arm-chair, and closed her eyes. In a few minutes she seemed to sleep, and Lottie returned to the kitchen. She hadn't been there a quarter of an hour when Swanell burst in. Lottie needed no call beyond what was in his face. Close to-

gether they hurried into the housekeeper's room.

Leah was standing, holding with her left hand to the chimneypiece. Strangely stiff was her gesture; all her breath appeared to be indrawn; the eyes were wide open, yet showed only the under part of the whites. There was something so dismaying in her aspect that even Lottie turned pale, while Swanell, as if in bodily fear of the old woman, set the room door wider open.

"The twenty-ninth," Leah called out in a most singular voice, for it seemed to come rumbling up from the abdomen; "what ails the twenty-ninth of April?—what's gone with Emmy Busshe's wedding day? The twenty-ninth, the twenty-ninth, the twenty-ninth. I don't hear the bells. I don't see the bride in her white. I don't see the clergymen in their white. I don't see the bridegroom with a white hot-house flower in his buttonhole. I see—I see——"

She was seized as if with a convulsion; struggled; then grew still. But Lottie Swanell's interest was wildly excited. She seized

hold of Leah by the arm. "What do you see?" she shouted.

Leah came to herself quite suddenly. It was like the snapping-to of a spring. "See?" she exclaimed in her natural tones, and showed her strong teeth in a cunning smile, "I see the anisette still on the table. I'll take another glass."

"Do you know what you've been saying?" asked Lottie.

"Saying? What's saying? It's doing counts. Give me another glass."

"You've had enough, mother," soothed Lottie.

"Have I?" Leah retorted so fiercely that Lottie jumped. "Then I thank you; I've sat in John Grant's father's arm-chair, and warmed my hand at John Grant's red hot coals, and tasted the anisette made by his housekeeper; and I thank you, John Grant's servants, I thank you both. Ha, my Jimmy" (her lost son) "was never in service. Free as a bird, free as the air the bird flies in. He wasn't sentenced to death yet they killed him in the prison. Only eighteen. And I can't

get justice—not in this world. Good morning!”

Instead of aiding herself with her stick, she snatched it up under one arm and was gone in a moment.

“At the gate already!” muttered Swanell, staring from the side door.

“I never saw her in one of her turns before,” said Lottie reflectively.

“A parent like that is a heavy cross,” commented Swanell; “Come in. Especially a female parent. In females everything’s so notorious.”

“Well, it might be worse. Few gentlemen would act as Mr. Grant has done and we might have had to support her among us. Take a glass of anisette, and don’t look so gone.”

They sipped in company.

“She ought to be in the county lunatic asylum,” said Swanell.

“It’d kill her. And after all, what harm does she do?”

“Brings a bad report on us.”

“Stuff.”

"That was nice talk of hers for a gardener's widow! She despises service."

"She's childish."

"Don't you mention anything to anybody as to what she said respecting the twenty-ninth. She knew when the Countess was going to die, Rose has told me."

"An elderly lady the doctors had given over. How clever! No, the anisette went to her head, that's the long and the short of it. Here's Ada Cramp, the girl from Fir Bank, coming up the drive. What's *she* after, I wonder?"

Ada Cramp had only come to ask for the loan of a colander.

Passing Como on her way back from Dr. Pinney's house, Miss Watkyn glanced here and there as if she expected to see again the person who had drawn her attention earlier in the morning. But under darkened heavens the long double-winged building had taken on a lonesome air. The gay troops of tulips in front of the house were as if frozen. So still. There were no clouds in the sky; a cloud suggests movement; one livid uniform grey held back the light. Birds were hiding. Young leaves showed their whitish under sides. Sud-

denly a puff of wind came; it was like the deep unconscious pant of a fever patient.

Miss Watkyn thought she would find Emmy at home. But the girl hadn't returned. As the aunt looked across from the drawing-room window to All Saints' Alley a white dazzling scythe precipitated itself from the sky-veil earthwards; a crack and a roar followed; the storm had begun.

Nervous Miss Watkyn was not. Yet she felt a wish to speak to some one. She went and half opened Frank Busshe's study door and looked in, a very unusual thing for her to do.

He was sitting, leaning forward, at his long writing-table; buried in a book. Miss Watkyn coughed. He looked up. In early youth he had been brilliantly handsome. Now he was but the shadow of a brilliance.

"What a storm!" ejaculated Miss Watkyn.

"Is Eaglet safe in the house?" he said.

"Yes," said Miss Watkyn.

Aunt Benny and Emmy did sometimes fib to Busshe. He had sick nerves and the least thing, especially if it was connected with Emmy, upset him. Emmy fibbed, and

thought no more about it; because she had been brought up on the idea that it was the only possible treatment for dad. But Miss Watkyn always strove to reconcile her conscience to these leaps from veracity. On this occasion it was easy. She believed Emmy to be safe in *a* house—Rose Swanell's. It was simply a question of substituting the definite for the indefinite article. Nothing, that.

Busshe was pacified and without further notice of the storm sank back into his book. Miss Watkyn left him.

The thunder and lightning were quickly over, and down came sheets of rain. "Ada, Ada," called Miss Watkyn, and Eliza, the old cook, appeared half-way up the basement stairs. "Tell Ada to shut all the windows."

Eliza did it herself, and then explained that she had sent round to Rufus Lodge to borrow a colander. Ada ought to have got back well before the storm began.

"The kitchen girl is her cousin," said Miss Watkyn, "it's a mistake to send her there."

"I need a new colander," said Eliza.

Miss Watkyn disliked buying anything,

She changed the subject as Eliza had known she would.

The rain ceased. In a few minutes the pools in the garden reflected blue sky. And Miss Watkyn came out of the kitchen, meaning to go upstairs and watch for Emmy.

All these old houses on the east side of the Daunt road, as it nears the river, are backed by the outskirts of a royal park. Both the front and the back basement doors at Fir Bank have glass in them, and when the front doors open you see right through the little house to the great park, and the effect is charming.

Miss Watkyn, half-way down the basement passage, just where the stairs start, stood still a moment; she heard Ada Cramp arriving at the back and wondered; should she stop and scold her for dawdling or leave it to Eliza. She then saw through the glass panes in the other door, with a degree of relief which was incomprehensible to herself, Emmy coming slowly up to the house. What a pretty figure of a girl she looked in her short dress; white with a broad mauve stripe. Meanwhile the back door opened; and standing at it Ada

Cramp went off in a fit of hysterics. With her shrieks came words: "Mr. Demmean's killed. Oh, oh! Mr. Demmean's been found dead. Oh, oh, oh! they've found him lying dead in the study at Como—shot through the heart. Oh, poor Miss Emmy! Oh, oh!"

Emmy had opened the basement front door which during the day was always left on the latch. The maidservant's tidings reached the young lady. She fell forward senseless.

Ten minutes later Dr. Pinney drove up. Miss Watkyn, at the upper front door, sprang to meet him. She grasped at both his hands.

"It's not true; say it's not true," she implored.

"I thought I'd be in time to be the one to warn you," he said. "Does Emmy know?"

Miss Watkyn nodded.

"But *is* it true?"

She hoped to hear she knew not what.

"It's true," said the doctor, "Julian Demmean was found half an hour ago—Ransom found him—lying dead in the room at Como he called his study,—shot through the heart."

Chapter IV

FIVE to six months passed. At half-past eight on an October evening, the hunter's moon, partly seen, leaning like a beautiful phantom over the topmost ridge of a cloud fortress, called up from the night another phantom, Como, the long silent shape of a house, with ochre tints gone white under the moon's touch. One front window showed light; the dining-room shutters hadn't been put up, and the curtains let through lamp glow and fire blaze. Two men, having done their dinner, turned round to the fire.

They were Dr. Pinney and Edward Demmean.

Captain Demmean was home with three months' leave. On the very day of his arrival at Como he had sent Pinney a note asking how soon he could come and dine. Pinney said to the messenger, "To-morrow." And here he was.

He guessed that Ned Demmean wanted to talk about his brother. So far, however, no way had been made. The doctor at first meeting muttered words among which "Sorry" alone was audible, and Demmean nodded and looked on the floor and that was all.

Ned Demmean was thinking of leaving the army. During dinner that subject came up. Not *the* subject. Julian wasn't mentioned.

But now—— Now, thought Pinney, surely he will speak.

They sat smoking. People say Pinney with his firm reddish cheeks, clear blue eyes and sandy-blond head has something about him liker sixteen than sixty-two. Certainly, Ned Demmean looked the more tired of the two. A quiet face, pale under sunburn; features as if blunted in the modelling; he was about the same height as Julian, five foot ten, otherwise unlike him. Broader, shorter in the neck and legs; stronger; fairly unnoticeable; while Julian drew eyes.

During Pinney's absence at the war he hadn't been long in the same quarters with Ned Demmean; but things happened which drew them close together. Accordingly there

could be no awkwardness in a silence between these two over the after-dinner fire, and as, contrary to his companion's expectations, Ned seemed inclined only to ruminate while he used up his cigarettes—Pinney smoked a pipe—why, the doctor let him.

They had had oysters, a bright little Irish stew, pheasant, cranberry tart with cream, a perfect cut of cheese; the drink was whisky; there were lemons on the table, and a rack of thin toast in the place of bread. The meal suited Pinney exactly; gallantly he had enjoyed everything and perhaps, on account of his digestion, wasn't sorry to have the grave moment deferred. That it would come before he left he still felt certain.

And he was right. His host was simply getting ready for it. Crosse & Crutchley, the Demmeans' solicitors, had sent out to the surviving brother all the information they could collect about Julian Demmean's death. Ned studied these papers till he knew them by heart.

How often already has the tragedy at Como enacted itself in his brain! And now and here, within the walls which closed in that inex-

plicable happening, it all comes suddenly over him with fresh force. Let it come. Thus.

When writing to his brother, Julian often spoke of himself in the third person as J. D. That was how, while he dwelled on all that was known of Julian's last day of life, Ned thought of him.

Well. On the morning of the fifteenth of April, 1920, J. D., a young fellow, in good health, easy position, going in a fortnight to be married for love, got up early and went into the Rufus Lodge garden which is next his own (the gardens communicate) to do some pistol practice. He and his neighbour had agreed to have a match.

He was badly beaten, he told his servant so, when at half-past eight he came in. There were in the house only this servant, Jacob Hinchley, a youngish man from Daunt; a middle-aged widow of the name of Grove, who had been caretaker at Como before J. D. took the place, and her young daughter Peggy. Usually J. D. went round after breakfast to Fir Bank, the home of his fiancée, Miss Busshe, a four or five minutes' walk. But on the evening of April 14th, as a result of some chaffing from

an old friend, Miss Busshe, for fun, made a public pact with J. D.; they were to spend the next day, April 15th, apart. While J. D. was breakfasting he rang for Hinchley and told him to go to a sale at Cotterell, about two miles off, to buy gardening implements. Hinchley left soon after half-past nine.

Mrs. Grove, who shared a roomy attic with her daughter, had been awake all night with a bad tooth. At eight o'clock Peggy made her a cup of tea and put a sleeping powder in it. Between half-past nine and ten Peggy took some flowers in to J. D.'s study as he called it—it used to be known as the morning-room. He was writing at the secretaire, his revolver beside him. He asked Peggy Grove to go to Kaye, the nearest considerable town, to get him some tobacco of a brand unobtainable in Daunt. She told him about her mother and he said, "Never mind, nothing will be wanted."

The girl got her bedrooms done. When she returned to J. D.'s study to ask if he had any more commissions for her in Kaye he was standing by the fire. He had finished and addressed a letter to his brother Captain Demmean who was serving abroad; he asked

Peggy to get a foreign stamp and post it. She noticed another letter, fastened up and addressed but not stamped which lay on the secretaire. Peggy didn't see what name and address it bore. There was a ring at the hall-door. Before answering it she said to J. D., what would he do if a ring came during her absence and Hinchley hadn't returned. Her mother was sound. He laughed and replied, "What should I do? An interesting question. The answer is, Wait and see!" He seemed quite himself—very bright. She went to the door. The visitor was an elderly lady, a stranger. Peggy thought she looked far from well off. She handed the girl her card and asked to see Mr. Demmean for a few minutes. Peggy only invited her just inside the hall door. When J. D. had glanced at the card he said, "Show her in!" Peggy Grove's lover was employed at a motor establishment in Kaye, her head was running on the unexpected chance her errand gave her of seeing him, and she never troubled to look at the card. She showed the lady in and went off.

The garden at Como extends widely to one side of the house and on this side its wall

forms one of the boundaries to a large open space in the Daunt road known as The Triangle. J. D. employed an old jobbing gardener called Robert Smith; he had as yet no regular gardener. On the morning of the 15th Smith was trimming some bushes under the wall by The Triangle. So he was a good way from the house. He came up there at half-past eleven for his lunch.

At the back of Como and the house next it, Rufus Lodge, there are fields called, on account of the use made of them, the lambing-fields. They are the property of the only farmer who, in this rapidly suburbanizing neighbourhood, still contrives to carry on. A narrow path across these fields forms a short cut to Daunt station. The tenants of Como and Rufus Lodge are allowed by the farmer to take this path, but they have to be careful not to abuse the privilege.

As Smith got near the house he saw an elderly lady in a brown dress and black coat walking slowly down the garden at the back as if bound for the door in the wall which gives on the lambing-fields. He didn't think about it, found his lunch put out by Peggy

Grove on the bench in the kitchen-yard where he usually ate it, and had nearly done when he heard two pistol shots, one coming in a minute, or perhaps more, after the other. Smith is rather deaf. He concluded that the gentleman of the house was practising in the piece of garden he reserved for this purpose; and paying no attention went back to his work.

Mrs. Grove drowsing in her attic heard the pistol-shots too. At least she was sure she heard one. Couldn't say for certain more than that. She was still stupid with the sleeping-powder.

After this comes a blank period filled up only by a short but terrific storm.

The next traceable incident is that Mrs. Grove really rouses up. She thinks she hears church bells. Then is startled by a scream which brings her completely to herself. She describes it as terrible and piteous. This outcry is made by Maurice Ransom, a young man formerly in J. D.'s employment as travelling secretary, now established as a photographer on the Daunt Road.

Young Ransom wanted three hundred pounds to help him on in his business and

J. D. was lending him the sum. He had told him to call on the afternoon of the 15th; said he would write a cheque for the amount. But Young Ransom getting a message on the telephone to engage him for wedding-party groups at an important house near Kaye, he came to see if it would suit J. D. to settle the matter earlier. He had rung at the hall-door (the ringing was turned by Mrs. Grove into church bells) and getting no answer made his way round to the back of the house. The footing he was on at Como authorized his doing this. Glancing in at the open French window of the study to see if J. D. was there, he saw him lying on the floor, entered, and found him to be dead.

He flew to Rufus Lodge. Mr. John Grant, the owner both of Rufus Lodge and Como, was just returned from the same sale at Cotterell which Hinchley had attended. Mr. Grant is a middle-aged man of means and leisure. Very intimate at Fir Bank. By what seemed a lucky chance Dr. Pinney of The Elms, Daunt Road, had driven up just as Grant got to his own doorstep. He came to ask Grant to vote for the candidate he

favoured at the approaching election for the Daunt District Council. When Ransom arrived they were together in the library. They went round at once. But there was nothing to be done. J. D. was dead—shot through the heart. His pistol, a six-chambered Army Service revolver, lay near, as if he had dropped it. Dr. Pinney's first remark after examining the wound was, "Whoever did this, it looks like the work of an expert."

The Coroner's jury arrived at the conclusion that the expert was the unfortunate young man himself. When giving evidence at the inquest, Maurice Ransom said that for some while back he had noticed a liability in J. D. to attacks of melancholy. The two often met; J. D. being interested in photography. On one occasion in the garden at Como they came on a mole that had been trapped and killed. J. D. looked fixedly at the creature, touched it with his stick, said, "Poor morsel!" then added, "After all, perhaps it would be better for me if I lay like that."

Another time he mentioned a play he had seen acted before the war. Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. The sensation-loving Hedda incites

her lover to shoot himself—through the heart. He does shoot himself, but in the stomach. J. D. said, “How could such a blunder be possible?” He kept up a sort of worry about it. But Ransom was the only person who had heard him talk like this.

Mrs. Grove, however, testified to having thought the poor young gentleman low-spirited at times. And three days before Mr. Demmean’s death when she came out with her duster into his study, thinking he was out, she saw him, she said, at the secretaire in a most dejected attitude, his arms before him and his head on his arms; and though she couldn’t swear to it, she was practically certain he was crying.

The idea of temperamental melancholy was accepted as accounting for the suicide.

Yet there were puzzling circumstances in the case.

1. A second Army Service revolver of the same weight as the one used by J. D. was found in the study; on a little sofa in a niche. One chamber had been emptied. This fact was explained as follows. J. D. collected pistols. He had a cabinet crammed with them,

He maintained that there were lucky and unlucky pistols, and apparently was always hoping to come on a lucky one. So it was supposed he had simply fetched in another of his own pistols before the act. As if doubting which he would use. Unfortunately no one could say whether the second pistol came out of the cabinet or not. J. D.'s servant, Jacob Hinchley, might have been expected to know, but he is a specially pacific person, was prevented by a stiff arm from serving in the war; he has no knowledge of fire-arms, no interest in them; he never went to the cabinet.

2. Owing to a whim on the part of Mr. Grant's invalid aunt who formerly lived at Como, the room she used as her sitting room—the same as J. D.'s study—communicates with her bedroom, a smaller room above, by means of a spiral staircase, so that the invalid could retire to rest at any moment quite privately. This was her motive for having the staircase constructed at considerable expense. Two rooms simply opening into each other wouldn't have done. She liked to live on the ground-floor and sleep higher. J. D. fancied the little bedroom, and was using it while still a

bachelor. Up to the window grows a splendid magnolia. After the morning of April 15th this creeper was found to bear traces of recent rough usage. As if some one had got down by it. On the other hand, the damage might very well have been done by the storm.

3. An engraving from Sir Thomas Lawrence's portrait of the Duke of Wellington, which hung on the wall to the side of the secretaire in J. D.'s study, had been pierced by a bullet through the eyes. This must have been the result of one of the two shots heard by the jobbing gardener, Robert Smith. J. D. had often said he disliked the picture. (When taking Como he bought the furniture of Mr. Grant at a valuation.) Yet he refused to move it. Apparently he had mutilated the picture before destroying himself.

4. The elderly lady in a brown dress, black mantle and green hat, seen by Peggy Grove and Robert Smith, and also by Miss Busshe's aunt who observed her going in at the gate of Como when she passed that way in the morning—that person couldn't be traced. No one at Daunt station or in the town remembered seeing anyone who answered to her

description. She was advertised for without effect. She seemed to have sunk into the earth.

5. The little door in the Como back-garden wall giving on the lambing-fields, and the other one which, at the end of the foot-track, gives access to the road, are fitted with the same padlock; so that one key serves for both doors. J. D. took jealous care of his key. Which was unlike him. True, he only got it through the good offices of Mr. Grant, that gentleman being an old friend of the farmer's. J. D. never lent his key. It had in his bedroom a special place, and no one in the house dared lay a finger on it. Well, that key was missing.

6. The card of the elderly female visitor was looked for in vain.

7. A large-sized, almost new gentleman's umbrella which had been in the hall was gone.

8. The letter Peggy Grove had noticed on the secretaire, written, fastened up and addressed by J. D. but not stamped—that letter—never turned up.

Chapter V

PINNEY had caught himself napping. Only just in time he brisked up. For Demmean abruptly turned round to him. "I've been thinking of my poor brother," he said. "What is *your* opinion? Did *you* agree with the coroner's jury? Suicide. Do *you* think it was that?"

"I do," said Pinney. Ned Demmean looked straight at him.

"And I'm as sure as I am of seeing you sitting there," he said, "that Julian was *murdered*."

He sank his voice on the word. Yet it seemed to the doctor as if he had shouted it.

"The whole thing was thoroughly gone into at the inquest," he remarked after the lapse of perhaps two minutes.

"I tell you, No. The jury were hypnotized by young Ransom's twaddle. Made up their minds on that."

"I was there you know. I think Ransom was speaking the truth. What object could he have in doing anything else? He is a heavy loser by your brother's death."

"Oh, I don't mean *that*. But I know the fellow. Vain as a peacock. His own evidence was safe to swell in his mind. It gave him such importance! Look here!—This sentimentalizing over a dead mole. This fuss about an incident in an old play. Julian made a remark or two no doubt. But if Ransom didn't exaggerate erroneously——" Ned paused; excited; "By the Lord, doctor," he ended on a lower note, "I know he did. I feel he did."

"That was not my impression. He seemed to me to give his evidence very carefully. Wasn't there one little bit of disingenuousness though? I've been told he was your brother's valet. He described himself as travelling secretary."

"He was never Julian's valet," decided Ned. "My grandmother thought no end of the family butler, the old Ransom—he married late; he was seventy when Maurice and Julian and myself were eighteen. He retired at seventy, and he and Maurice lived together in a pretty

cottage on the estate. Maurice worked with my grandmother's old bailiff. The bailiff died, and the old lady, quite sick at the idea of a new man, managed with Maurice after that. Then Julian took several runs abroad in the Oxford vacations and Maurice went with him. It was inconvenient, but my grandmother never refused Julian anything. He certainly didn't go as a valet. They were in rough parts mostly where two men would be just two men. I'm not particularly wrapt up in young Ransom, but I think travelling secretary was an allowable flourish."

Ned would always take any amount of trouble in order to be fair. He now returned to his main subject. "Then the housekeeper," he said. "Mrs. Grove. She's here with me now. What is her chatter worth?"

"Oh," said Pinney, smiling slightly, "I give you Mrs. Grove. If a man mayn't lean forward on his desk for a moment! However, I assure you, Ned, the whole of the evidence was considered with all possible care, and I only know one man who—privately, to me afterwards—found fault with the verdict."

"What man?"

"Gaywood, the detective-inspector at Kaye."

"I must see him." Ned gave a start as if about to quit his chair.

"He's at Hastings," said Pinney. "Recruiting. Been ill. He'll be back in three weeks."

Pinney's pipe had gone out. He now re-lighted it. A servant came in with a basket of fresh logs, and threw some on the fire. Pinney recognized Jacob Hinchley, the man Julian Demmean had had to wait on him. His parents were Daunt people, the doctor knew him well. Four or five and thirty. A flat figure, loosely joined together. A faded freckled face; very white teeth; the two upper front ones conspicuously longer than the rest. When he had left the room Pinney drew his chair nearer to Demmean's.

"There was a certain amount of money lying about, you know," he said, "no great sum, but easy to get at. Nothing was touched. If the crime you visualize was committed by an armed thief, he must obviously have thought he heard some one coming, and escaped through the window of the upper room. But what professional thief would break in the middle of the morning into a house

like this—so far from lonely—tenanted by an active young man with servants—on the chance of picking up something worth while? Robbery as a motive is only thinkable on the part of some one already on the premises. Hinchley, who, I see, you have here, is frightened of pistols. Which used to amuse your brother. Besides he was at the sale at Cotterell from start to finish. Didn't leave till after the catastrophe. Robert Smith, the jobbing gardener, is seventy. A fossil. The boy who looked after the motor had gone to a sister's wedding. Then——”

Demmean stopped him.

“I wasn't thinking of any such vulgar crime,” he said. “If it was done the motive was *special*—passional. I say if—but I haven't a moment's doubt on the point. Why do you suppose I'm here in this accursed spot which, bar your society, hasn't a single attraction for me? I should have made some arrangements about the house with Mr. Grant, and never come near it; but it's the right centre, you see, for me to work from. That's all I think about.”

"Oh!" mused Pinney. "You're here in the character of a detective."

"Stuff." Ned wasn't best pleased. "I simply want to clear my brother's memory," he said. "Prove he didn't spend his last moments jumping about with a pistol like one of these beastly degenerates, first monkeying with a picture, then——"

"Supposing he *did*," said Pinney firmly, "you take a wrong tone. It would mean just brain trouble. Nothing shameful."

"There's no brain trouble in our family." Ned leaned forward. From the kindling wood a flame shot up, bringing the angles and hollows of his face into sharp relief. There was a short silence. Then he said, "I grant you, poor Julian was no bad hand at getting into scrapes. A charming fellow—a charming nature"—(Pinney nodded assent)—"but weak on one point. A dangler after women. I was jolly glad to hear of his engagement. I thought a nice girl he was seriously fond of would be the making of him." (Pinney nodded again.) "Well, since the damned war," Ned went on, "relations between men and women

have been rather particularly——” He waited for a word.

“Kaleidoscopic,” suggested the doctor.

“Yes. My notion is that Julian paid with his life for some such folly. I seem to see the root of the event back in his past—his recent past. He got his discharge twenty months ago. Lived in town. Plenty might happen. Luckily he had the same servant with him all the while—a sergeant, slightly invalided. Julian was always free with servants. Too free. At least for my taste. He dismissed this fellow, I don’t know why, before coming to settle at Daunt. His name is Trair. He’s with relations in Jersey now, I’ve ascertained that; he’ll be in London in November. Then I must get hold of him. He’ll have something to say about Julian’s surroundings. May be a help.”

Suddenly Ned pushed his chair back; he stood up. “A detective!” he said. He had a bitter little laugh. “I’ve no genius in that direction. But I can see out of my eyes. I don’t mind what I spend either in time or money, and I’ve *hope*; it’s borne in on my mind that I shall succeed. Trace the individual who

was let in on the morning of the 15th of April, by Julian himself; the man who either employed the elderly woman visitor as a spy or gave her hush-money after the fact of which she was somehow accidentally a witness; the assassin who was clever enough to arrange Julian's revolver from off the secretaire so as to indicate suicide——”

“And stupid enough to leave his own behind?” Pinney broke in.

“Possibly.”

“What about the shot at the picture?”

“Say the interview opens quite amicably. The conversation turns on pistol-shooting. Julian, like the baby he was, is tempted to show his skill by aiming at the eyes in the Duke's portrait, which he disliked. The other man takes out his own revolver while my brother's back is to him, and as he turns shoots him dead.”

“I didn't know you had so much imagination,” commented Pinney.

Ned didn't appear to hear.

“The failure of the woman caller to come forward,” Pinney remarked, “isn't as odd as you think it. She's probably single. You

don't know elderly single women as I do. Quite often their bugbear is—getting mixed up in anything. So they put it. The more you advertised for a person like that, the deeper she'd burrow."

Ned's hands were in his trouser pockets; his chin stuck out.

"But the key, and the unstamped letter Peggy Grove saw, and the visiting card and the umbrella disappeared too," he said. "Each of these things is a trifle in itself. Taken together with the invisibility of the elderly woman they form a *chain*. A chain which has in it the making of a *clue*. A clue to the identity of *the unknown guilty agent on the scene*."

"Well," said the doctor, "a few minutes back you gave the reins to your fancy. Now let me have a try. I presume the elderly lady was an acquaintance of your brother's. Otherwise, when he saw her card, he'd hardly have said at once, 'Show her in.' When she is leaving he describes the short cut through the lambing-fields to the road leading to Daunt station and lends her his key. The weather looks threatening. He lends his umbrella too. Stupidly

frightened, as I've pictured her, afterwards, she returns neither. That leaves only the letter as to which, after all, Peggy Grove may have made a mistake. Or did Julian write it—change his mind—throw it in the fire? The card would *most* probably be burnt as soon as read. As for the magnolia, Detective Inspector Gaywood was certain it had been used as a ladder, but Grant's gardener, who ought to know, insisted that in that case, the tree would have suffered a lot more—he said it was simply a bit spoilt by the storm. So the magnolia tells neither way."

"You forget that Julian never parted with the key."

Pinney was silent a moment. Then he said very gently, "But when a man is about to end his days he doesn't mind what he parts with."

Ned had a movement as if someone had hit him.

"And tell me," Pinney went on, "why were errands invented for the servants unless Julian wanted privacy for the doing of *that* which he had determined should be done? Hinchley said at the inquest garden implements weren't needed, and plenty of the tobacco Peggy

Grove went to Kaye to buy was found amongst Julian's things."

"What are you talking about?" growled Ned. "If he wanted privacy he'd only got to lock the study door."

Pinney glanced up at him. Ned Demmean has had fever, said the doctor to himself. It's hanging about him still, and he has brooded over this idea till it has become an obsession.

He decided to argue the point no further; he changed his ground.

"I brought Emmy Busshe into the world," he said, "and I'm very fond of her. I wish for her sake you could prove yourself right. It would take the poison out of her wound if she didn't have to think that on the eve of marriage with her Julian had made away with himself."

"Well; in a month or less," said Ned with his heated eyes fixed before him, "I shall get to work. I'm only waiting for Trair. Then there's this other man—the police-officer you spoke of—I shall find him a very interesting acquaintance. And while I rest on my oars I'm soaking in the atmosphere that was Julian's; by no means wasting time. That was why I

engaged Hinchley, who's next door to an idiot. Julian liked stupid people about him. I don't share the taste. He said they rested his mind. I haven't mind enough to need resting, I suppose." He walked to the end of the room and returned. "About my cousin, Emily Busshe," he said. "Julian wrote that her people weren't well off. Look here, doctor! He died intestate. Meant to make a will on his wedding-day, no doubt. That's one of the difficulties in the suicide solution of the mystery. Would he have left the girl whose life he was wrecking without a penny?"

"That letter—his last letter to you—the one Peggy Grove posted," said Pinney, "it's failing to reach you was a great misfortune—common enough—out of twenty letters my dear wife wrote me while I was in Mesopotamia I only got fourteen. But this was particularly bad luck. It might have cleared up much. Perhaps he recommended Emmy to your—hm!—consideration!"

"I'll never get it now. I've made myself a byword with the Post Office authorities—no results. But I don't need to be told that Emily Busshe ought to have something. It's so

clear. Will they make any difficulty, d'you think?"

"Speak to Grant."

"Not to the father?"

"Emmy may be said to have two fathers and Busshe, the real one, is the sleeping partner in the concern. At the same time there's a strangely strong tie between him and his child and in feature they're extremely alike. For a week after the catastrophe Emmy lay motionless in her bed, refusing to eat. All that time Busshe fasted too. At the end of the week I told her. She said nothing, but in the afternoon she got up, dressed, came down and had tea with her father."

"Game!"

"Wasn't it?" Pinney's eyes shone moist. "By the by, they don't speak of it," he said. "Julian's name isn't mentioned at Fir Bank. She said she'd get on best like that. Whether she'll feel like seeing you——"

"That's of no consequence. It's the money. She could get away—go abroad."

"Yes." After a moment's thought—"Busshe is a bundle of inconsequences," Pinney remarked. "You'd think he doesn't know what

money *is*. Yet he's proud as the devil about taking any. If I were in your place I should begin by sounding Grant."

"What sort is he?"

"A good sort."

"There's an aunt, isn't there?"

"Oh yes. An excellent person. But not much head."

Ned had dropped back into his chair by this time. Legs out, eyes half closed. Pinney was turning the insides of his legs to the blaze, rubbing the heat in. "Queer how things come about," he said. "It was Grant's father introduced me here. In Daunt, I mean. I remember his telling me he had thought of taking a house Epping Forest way, but his wife begged for the Thames. Well, when young Ransom bought that little house of his your brother good-naturedly came down to see his purchase. He knew there was a cousin of his father's in the neighbourhood but didn't propose to go near him. He did *not* know that the old medico you'd written to him about from Mespot lived at Daunt. But I'd been doctoring Ransom. He happened to mention me to your brother. Pinney? Hector

Pinney? Off after me at once. He wanted to talk about you, you know. He was very fond of you. I walked back with him to young Ransom's studio. Emmy Busshe and her aunt hove in sight. Julian was greatly struck with Emmy. I told him who she was and the minute they were introduced. So, as a matter of fact, our John Grant's mother laid the foundation for the cousins getting engaged when she had her way with her husband about the Thames. Queer."

"Yes, Julian was fond of me," said Ned in a low voice. "He *was*."

Chapter VI

EARLY in the afternoon of the next day Ned went to see Maurice Ransom. Pinney had told him about the tinted photo-portrait on porcelain. After Julian's death it was sent back from Fir Bank. They were afraid to let Emmy see it. Ned wished to buy the portrait.

A warm day. In the window-boxes of Maurice's compact little red villa the cosy gay petunias are beginning to curl up.

Mrs. Maurice herself came to the door. Pinney had mentioned that she was handsome. So far as he gave the matter a thought Ned expected to see flaunting good looks.

Here she stands. Beautiful rather than handsome. The face is clear in outline under auburn hair about which Miss Watkyn is mistaken; it waves of itself. The complexion has the china white and rose-leaf rose which sometimes go with red in the hair. The well-cut

nose is almost straight with the forehead. Perhaps the mouth is a trifle wide and the lips are thinnish. But their colour is splendid and they part to show unexceptionable teeth. No, the mouth doesn't spoil her; if the face, as a whole, has a fault it is in the expression. Coral Ransom's blue eyes are cold.

She had on a thin black dress very little cut down at the throat or up at the skirt-hem. Compared to the forms which were so liberally on show everywhere in 1920 she was nunlike. Yet the contours spoke. Exquisitely.

For one instant Ned looked taken aback. Coral knew that look. She met it with one which was very aware but very calm. However, her glance didn't matter to Ned. His surprise had been admiring; that over, she wasn't the sort of woman to appeal to him in any way whatever.

Maurice had gone out. Mrs. Ransom expected him back very shortly. Would Captain Demmean care to wait? Ned came in. He spoke of his brother's portrait; and Coral took him to the studio. It was built out at the back of the house.

In one corner of the long room, which was

arranged with great taste, there stood on an easel a large picture with drapery thrown over it. Ned knew the moment he entered the room what it was. Coral took off the vapoury red veiling and then with consummate tact went to the other end of the room and stood blowing dust off the leaves of the tall flowering plants which were grouped there.

It was three years since the brothers' last meeting. Julian had come through the war with sufficient distinction and no great damage; only one notable wounding; in the shoulder. While he was convalescent at Nice Ned got a fortnight's leave and came and spent it with him.

There was the face; all Julian was in it; dazzle; dash; gaiety; elusiveness; something sad.

Ned looked awhile; then turned towards Coral; she immediately came and joined him. Her movements were leisurely. Like her husband she lacked freedom—simplicity. But her abiding self-consciousness was of a different kind from his. Not the least underbred.

"It's a wonderful likeness," said Ned.

"I think so," she said.

"You knew my brother, I suppose."

"Oh yes. But only for a month. Until a month before the fifteenth of April I was away nursing my mother in a long, terrible illness. I returned home in the middle of March."

Instead of telling him that her mother had died she looked down at her black dress and black silk stockings and black-buckled shoes. Then she went on. "Your brother was very artistic," she remarked.

"Always taking something up."

"He took photography up."

"That brought him here."

"Yes—— He did some really good views in the Park. Have you seen them at Como?"

"Not yet. I haven't had time."

After this they stood silent till Ned be-thought himself of asking whether Mrs. Ransom was interested in her husband's work.

"Oh yes. I help him a lot."

"He's fortunate," said Ned politely.

She smiled; a faint becoming smile. She glanced through the window. "Here he comes," she said. "I'll tell him you're here."

She withdrew and almost directly Maurice came in by a different door.

Even in childish days, when Maurice Ransom was valuable in games calling for three, Ned had never been keen on him. He had despised Maurice for his liability to funk; while Julian enjoyed the sense of superiority accruing to himself therefrom. Then Ned was bothered by Maurice's devotion to Julian who, coquettish as a girl, often played on the jealousy of his twin.

Later Ned didn't trouble his head much about the florid, adaptable, aspiring offspring of his grandmother's old butler. But when he did think of him it was with a cool feeling, to say the least of it.

He now saw at a glance that Maurice was improved. Less high in colour; slimmer; quieter in his dress. He had had a trick of imitating Julian's ways and manners which used to exasperate Ned. However, the image of Julian which came with Maurice's rushing walk up the studio (only in Julian that hasty effect was grace itself, in Maurice not)—didn't exasperate the surviving twin. He only felt a dreary pang.

“Captain Demmean!” Maurice exclaimed. They shook hands. Ned praised the portrait. Maurice at once asked him to accept it. But Ned insisted on paying. “Have you a few minutes?” he enquired, when that business was done.

“Yes,” Maurice replied. “It’s early for chance sitters and I haven’t an appointment this afternoon before 3.30.”

They sat down on a sofa, and Ned told Maurice that he wanted to carry out what he was sure would have been his brother’s wish; he contemplated placing the three hundred pounds Julian was to have lent him to Maurice Ransom’s account—at what bank, please? Not as a loan but a souvenir.

Maurice started away from the proposition. Ned thought his behaviour odd. He was at once upset and guarded. “No, Captain Demmean. It’s a generous idea on your part, but——”

“Not generous. Just.”

“Not at all. Kindly say no more about it.”

“Borrow it then, as you meant to do.”

“No, thank you. Don’t misunderstand me. I’m obliged, I’m sure”—Maurice fiddled sav-

agely with his watch-strap—"but——" Suddenly he seemed to have an inspiration. "The fact is, Captain Demmean," he said in an easier tone, "the need is past."

"How's that, if I may ask?"

"Certainly. Early in the year I felt disappointed in my opening here. I thought of moving. That would have been expensive. But during the summer things have looked up. I'm getting to be known. And my wife seems to like the place. She's acquainted with some of the principal ladies in Daunt who are interested in High Church work. They work under Mr. Sim, the celibate vicar of All Saints'. He excites great enthusiasm. My wife's High. Exceedingly High."

"And are you exceedingly High?" Ned enquired.

"It's a bit different with us men, isn't it?" said Maurice in modest accents. "But I have a great respect for Mr. Sim."

Ned had made up his mind *not* to talk freely to Maurice about Julian. He didn't think Maurice could give him anything. Already at the inquest he had said rather more than the truth (such was Ned's fixed opinion) and

what would be the use of letting him say it, perhaps with fresh additions, over again?

He had expected to have some difficulty in choking Maurice off, for the young man was a talker. Lo, the reverse was the case. Maurice seemed even more determined not to speak on the subject of his lost friend, patron and paragon's end than Ned was not to hear about it. It wasn't from excess of feeling, either; no, not that. Something there was in his mind he didn't want Julian Demmean's brother to get at. Ned felt puzzled.

But it was close on half-past three. Ned jumped up. "I'm glad you're so flourishing," he said. "If you won't take the money you won't. But if later—well—it'll always be ready for you if you want it, you know."

Maurice shook his head.

Coming back from seeing his visitor out he met his wife in the pigmy entrance hall.

"Did you answer the door to Captain Demmean?" he said.

"Yes."

"What's the use of keeping a servant at forty pounds a year if you're to let yourself down like that?"

“Hilda was dressing,” said Coral indifferently. “And how behind you are! *Now* a Duchess can open her own door to a visitor if she wants to. Nobody thinks anything of anything.”

Thus summarizing post-war mental chaos, she moved towards the studio.

“Has Hilda done dressing?” said Maurice quite meekly.

“Ages ago.”

The sitter who had made an appointment rang.

Chapter VII

NED DEMMEAN went on to Fir Bank. Whether or no Grant was to act as his adviser and ambassador in the affair of the money he wished poor Julian's fiancée to have as if by bequest—it seemed to Francis Busshe's cousin right that he himself should call.

Apparently the young maid (Ada Cramp had left) who came to the door didn't think it right. When he asked for Mr. Busshe, mentioning his own name, her bead eyes and button mouth threatened to burst their boundaries. Desperate inaction only lasted a few seconds, however; then she took the visitor up a narrow winding old staircase, opened a door, said, "Captain Demmean to see Mr. Busshe," and ran away.

The room was pleasant with its old dim-coloured furniture and two bow-windows framing the fading green of trees. Miss Watkyn rose from a settee. Ned remembered Pinney's

saying that she hadn't much head. To the outward view she had plenty; he saw a large head, a large face, a large bunch of grey hair, large body and limbs, large skirts, a large orange jumper which she was knitting. The assortment gasped at him disconcertingly. He didn't know her name.

"I thought—I wanted to come——" he said not without awkwardness. "In fact, I should be glad to speak to Mr. Busshe. I'm at Como for a time."

Miss Watkyn dropped her work and he picked it up. "Oh yes," she said, as if the incident freed her tongue. "Of course we knew you were expected at Como. How do you like the house? Frank—your cousin—Mr. Busshe—takes his rest at this time, but I daresay——"

"No, don't disturb him. I'll call another day. What time would suit him?"

The door-handle turned. Miss Watkyn looked really frightened. "Don't mention your brother to Emmy," she whispered.

Emmy entered the room. One of the nicest things in it was an old-fashioned French screen. This was placed so as to keep off the draught from the door to the further window

in which Miss Watkyn had been sitting. So, as Emmy very slowly advanced towards the open baby grand piano, which was opposite the door, she became visible to Ned and the aunt half a minute before she herself could see that anyone was in the room. And just at that half minute she abruptly stood still. As if something flashed into her mind.

What is Emmy like now? Very thin; very pale; with indescribable shadow-slopes in her hollowed-out young face; yet strange to say she looks younger; the flowering of the woman in her has been checked; perhaps, too, it is because the figure is so straight, so extra slight. The eyes, too large in the face lessened in size, are as bright as if the whole life centered there; the lips have only a faint mauve-rose tint.

As she came to a stand her head was slightly drawn back, her arms hung down.

Ned looked at her. The burning eyes, the decided features, especially the prominent mouth—fixed; the colourlessness, the wasting; the shadow-lines, the deep, uncomplaining, hopeless look struck on him strongly. No longer did the aunt's agitation appear absurd. He himself felt as nervous as in a fight—just

before the action begins. (Once it began he was all right.) What would happen? Would she abominate seeing him? Would it do her any harm?

That pausing figure! That petrified yet all too speaking visage! Poor child, poor child.

His eyes, travelling down from her face, were caught by a small foot with a haughtily arched instep. For some mysterious reason it was of all female charms the one which appealed to him most. Oh, mixed man! The swell of pity within him grew fierce—fervent; changed, ceased to be pity, he fell over head and ears in love with his cousin.

The girl turned with a sharp movement away from the piano. At once she caught sight of her aunt and the stranger. She pulled at the loose band of her dress as if touching a spring that kept her going; and she advanced.

“Captain Demmean to see your father, dear,” said Miss Watkyn, smooth and shaky. “I was just saying it’s his rest hour.”

The muscles of Emmy’s mouth contracted. She turned the twitch into a smile. Very different it was from her old smiles. Quietly she

shook hands with Ned. "I don't want your father to be disturbed," he muttered.

Then John Grant walked in. Ned saw at once what a relief his appearance on the scene was both to aunt and niece. They ceased to feel any responsibility. Miss Watkyn explained the situation. Grant pooh-poohed the idea that this was with Francis Busshe an inviolable hour. "He doesn't like callers ever," he remarked to Demmean. "So he works all the morning, rests and walks in the afternoon, works again till dinner. Very simple, isn't it? I've just been with him. He'll see you, I'm sure. I'll fetch him."

If Coral Ransom had been something of a surprise to Ned, Grant was a bigger one. He had imagined a good-natured looking chap more than a bit run to seed; fattish; fidgetty; he thought this was the sort who *would* spend half his time superintending another man's family affairs.

Greatly enlightened, he saw the tall muscular figure with its marked uprightness and unmistakable power; the keen, sagacious, masterful face; even the correct clothes, the well-

groomed look of the man helped in the unexpectedness of the impression.

Ned felt also that Grant for his part gave him an uncommonly searching glance. Summing me up, are you, old fellow?—he said to himself. Well, the Lord be with you.

However, nothing could be more polite than Grant's behaviour; he left the room and two minutes later Francis Busshe appeared, in his friend's keeping, as it were. He had his spectacles in his left hand and seemed not quite sure of anything; but the fact that he desired to give Edward Demmean a proper reception came to light somehow.

Grant directed rather than led the conversation; he didn't say much. Ned found himself talking at length about his voyage over, which had been perfectly uninteresting. That didn't signify. He seemed to be admitted as one of the family circle; Busshe, in an arm-chair, sat looking towards him though not at him; Emmy, beside her father, could be well seen; and Ned observed that she looked different now. She was acting the part of a young woman who has nothing wrong with her.

To make the first visit a long one would ob-

viously be a mistake. In a quarter of an hour he got up to go. How pleased Busshe was! He had such a bright smile it made him look inspired. "Come again," he said. "Come, any *evening*. Whenever you like, in the *evening*. Remember you're a relation—in the evening."

Then he opened the door hardly at all, squeezed through the slit which was so narrow that it seemed a feat—though there was nothing of him—and was gone.

Ned addressed Miss Watkyn.

"*Shall* I look in some evening?" he said boyishly.

"Oh—of course——" she said, in wavering haste.

Ned glanced at Emmy. Their eyes met, for hers had been fixed on him. She looked away instantly and he could see her chest give a quick heave.

"It'll over-excite him, Aunt Benny," she said hastily. A momentary turn towards Ned. "Let me tell you. Dad plays chess with Mr. Grant when he's here; when he isn't Aunt Benny gets out. Go Bang and they go bang till they stop. Or else I help him with Patience. We can't play a game because he hates

himself to lose and hates me to lose too. So he'd get no fun that way. Are you a chess-player? They're precious."

She was standing with a hand on the back of the chair her father had vacated. Her manner had a curious touch of defiance. Ned said, unfortunately he only knew the moves.

"Well, that's how we all begin," said Grant, who was a famous hand, and while letting Busshe win four times out of six always contrived to give him a good game.

Ned made his adieux. Grant saw him downstairs.

Out in the street again, the young man stood still a minute. He looked about him. The grey old queer, congested-looking front of the Fir Bank house; the long All Saints' Alley opposite, showing on one side the allotments, their early autumn overgrowth scarcely yet touched by decay; jungles of the tall green-flaring, drop leafed Jerusalem artichokes, heavy gold of sunflowers up in air; the main road as if blinded by the afternoon sun, but shade lay on that quiet branch of it which terminated at two gates, a shut one, the vicarage garden gate, an open one leading to the churchyard; on all this

and on the river Ned turned his back. He walked past the Wesleyan Chapel and the boat-yard; the Dangerous Corner signal-board, so high and fierce, brought him to the Roebuck Hotel and to Maurice Ransom's red villa with the petunias going off in the window-boxes; he crossed at the Triangle and saw people waiting for a tram under the wall of his own grounds.

He was thinking—I summoned Pinney to dine with me as if I was a Sultan. Lost my manners in Mespot. I'll atone. He's a married man. I'll go this very minute and call on his wife. Who will perhaps mention EMMY BUSSHE.

Pinney's house was on the high-road; twenty minutes' walk from Como. As Ned got there the doctor's little car spun up. He jumped out and seized Ned by the arm. "Come in and have a cup of tea."

Mrs. Pinney was fifty-five. She was pretty still. Inclined to be stout. Motherly, though she had never had a child. She received Ned like a son, insisted that he had saved her Hector's life out in Mespot ("no, no, Mrs. Pinney, he saved mine"), patted a chair close to her

own invitingly, emptied the cream jug into the visitor's tea.

"And what have you been doing with yourself?" she enquired.

Ned felt absolutely at home with Mrs. Pinney.

"I've just called on my cousin at Fir Bank," he said.

"Did you see Emmy?"

"Yes."

"The darling's a wreck, you know. She was the brightest, most fascinating thing. Wasn't she, Hector?"

Pinney nodded.

"She looks delicate," muttered Ned.

Mrs. Pinney's hands went up.

"Hector's dreadfully anxious about her."

Ned's heels felt cold.

"Chatterbox!" shouted the doctor across the saucerful of tea at his mouth.

He gulped the saucer dry, put it down and said, turning to Ned, "I no longer fear for life or reason. But—well, Emmy's your cousin. I'll tell you what I think. In her determination to live the misery down she's overdoing it. Always *at* something. Grant is teaching her

Italian, they're reading Dante, who, I've been told, is a tiring author. Then *she* has in needy girls wanting to learn the piano. Coaxes Busshe to dictate to her. Walks farther and faster than she used. Gives herself no respite. And it's not in her nature."

"No, that it isn't," testified Eve Pinney.

Ned sat catching eagerly at details which helped him to a clearer image of Emmy. The Emmy who a little earlier in the day he had thought of with good-natured pity—just that.

For a minute or two no one spoke. The doctor seemed in a dream. Suddenly he glanced up. "Oh dear, don't let's grizzle," he said almost comically. "Time. Time. Emmy's under twenty. Something happy's bound to turn up for her."

"Who else did you see?" Mrs. Pinney inquired of Ned.

"Everybody, including Mr. Grant. Has he nothing to do but run Fir Bank?"

"Oh dear, yes," Mrs. Pinney protested. "He's a splendid musician, has an organ and plays too gloriously, his garden is the loveliest in Daunt and it's all his own taste—he does astronomy—and since he came back from the

war he's consented to be a magistrate. He sits on the Bench at Kaye."

"A magistrate," commented Ned. "He ought to make a first-rate one, I should say. Only they never are first-rate, are they?"

This question wasn't answered, for the door opened and a sallow, quiet-looking, clever-faced young woman was coming in when she saw Captain Demmean and would have withdrawn in a hurry, but Mrs. Pinney called out, "Are you ready for me, Rose?"

"Yes, please."

"I'll be with you in a minute." The girl disappeared. "My dressmaker," smiled Mrs. Pinney at Ned.

"My wife's a great dresser," Pinney informed him.

"*He* goes about looking like a dustman, Captain Demmean. Somebody must be decent."

Ned leaned back in his chair. Pinney's remark as to his certainty that all would sooner or later be well with Emmy again had done the young man good. He dared not own to himself how far his hopes for the future took him. Or rather how near—Emmy. But he had just now a very comfortable feeling, and

he liked the jolly affection of the elderly pair. Mrs. Pinney went nodding and smiling out of the room.

Pinney said, "Did you happen to notice that young person?"

"A good sensible face."

"She's the daughter of Leah Swanell. The old half-gipsy—you remember—she was called at the inquest—the old woman who on the morning of the fifteenth of April foretold that Emmy Busshe's wedding wouldn't come off."

"I remember," said Ned. "You don't think it was a case of genuine second-sight——"

"Why not?"

"It didn't read like one."

"Oh, they could make nothing of her at the inquest. She pretended to be sillier than she is. But—I don't know. Leah Swanell is a singular character."

"Anyhow, it doesn't affect the main question," said Ned. He was uninterested, therefore. The subject dropped.

Soon after Ned had left Fir Bank Grant and Emmy stood waiting in the upper porch for Busshe; they were going to walk in the

Park. Grant said in a low voice, "Did it worry you, seeing Edward Demmean?"

"No," she said, after a moment's hesitation.

"There's no likeness."

"No. Except the hair and ears. But if there was! My life's a dream. Does it matter what one dreams?"

Then after all, Emmy *could* speak of her loss? Yes. When she was alone with Grant.

Chapter VIII

LOVE at first sight, on one side at any rate, is a common thing. Romantic as are most common things, when you come to think about them; but there it is—common.

William Cobbett, a hard-headed politician, agriculturist and newspaper man, hadn't been an hour in the same room with the young girl who was his fate, when he no more had a thought of her ever marrying anyone but himself than he had a thought of her being transformed into a chest of drawers. So he tells us.

And I knew a young scientist who, going out with an elderly scientist, waited at the door of the schoolroom while the elder man looked in to nod a good-bye to his daughter. The girl of sixteen with a pigtail was putting her lesson-books away on a high shelf. She glanced round and lo, the young scientist was done in. Eight years later he married the girl, though she had started her career by getting engaged to some one else.

But to Ned Demmean his own seizure seemed miraculous. He had had experiences with virtuous but flirtatious matrons, girls out to wed, and the third, the new species which without being avowedly commercial simply asks to be picked up. Nobody ever really got him. As soon as he ceased to be very young he sheered off from it all; or, as he himself would have said, "didn't bother."

Now in the study at Como he sat leaning forward, with his head between his hands, bothering considerably.

He reflected that a bereaved woman often marries a near relation or the closest friend of her dead.

The morbid atmosphere Emmy was living in. To tempt her out of it. (Her eyes! Her soul! Her feet!) This silence she insisted on. As soon as *he* knew her well enough he would speak. Speak of Julian. The natural and therefore the best course. She had tied herself up, not knowing what she was doing. He would cut the cords. (Her eyes! Her soul! Her feet!)

Grant. Hm! He had been very civil. A devilish deal too civil. You'd think he was

master at Fir Bank. Well, but wasn't he? Julian in his letters spoke warmly of John Grant. Ned felt as if behind his civility, so to speak, the man was overbearing—supercilious. What did it matter? Why think about him at all? They were reading Dante, were they? Ned knew nothing of Dante. He looked round him.

The so-called study was much as it had been in the Contessa's time except that paper and paint were less light. It had not come altogether easy to Ned to establish himself here; but he had strong on him the fancy he spoke of to Pinney; he wanted to live just as his brother had lived.

One side of the room was lined with bookshelves. The door at the foot of the little staircase leading to the upper room didn't show; it was contrived so as to form in appearance part of the shelves.

The handsome secretaire stood nearly in the centre of the room. There was an upright piano away from the wall to one side of the French window. On the other side used to hang the large engraving from Sir Thomas Lawrence's portrait of the Duke of Welling-

ton, which on the morning of the fifteenth of April had had a bullet sent through the upper part of the face. An oil painting of the same size, a landscape subject done by an amateur, now occupied its place. Then there was an invalid's lounge-chair which, though he never ailed anything, had been Julian's delight. Here was Ned perched as it were, unappreciatingly, on the edge of it.

It was getting dusk. Hinchley came in. Not bad to see somebody's face, though it was only Hinchley's. Pallid and freckled, with reddish eyes, and those obtrusive upper teeth, he was certainly rather remarkably ugly. He looked resigned and a trifle timid.

"Shall I shut up, sir?"

"Oh, yes!" The electric light popped on and Hinchley laid a newspaper on the little round table near the fireplace. "What's that?"

"*Kaye and Daunt Times*, sir."

"Oh, local." Ned's tone was disparaging.

"Mr. Demmean always took it," said Hinchley plaintively, "and"—cheering up—"there've been two burglaries at Kaye this week."

"Toss it over."

Hinchley took himself off. Ned went and surveyed the bookshelves. Dante was well represented. Two Italian editions and an English translation. Cary's. Ned sat down and opened the volume. When he was at Fir Bank he might be glad to be able to talk about Dante. But he was unable to fix his attention. Tried the burglaries and found himself wondering whether Emmy Busshe liked motoring.

The door of the room slowly opened as if of itself. No one was to be seen. Ned knew the meaning of this phenomenon. Mrs. Grove had been a parlour-maid in what is called good service. Bursting in was her bugbear. She hardly knew how to be gradual enough. As soon as the door had been wide open for a few seconds she materialized, so to speak. Yes. Here she was in her black afternoon gown. Her comely face was solemn. "I beg pardon for disturbing you, sir."

"What is it?"

"Hinchley thought the letter on the slab where your letters always *are* put, was so large you must have seen it, but as it hasn't

been opened I took the liberty to wonder if it had escaped your notice."

"I've seen no letter," said Ned. He hadn't glanced towards the slab on coming in. He was up from his seat, for he hated giving women trouble. Mrs. Grove, however, who was only forty-two, bounded to the slab in the hall. To avoid the absurdity of a race Ned stayed where he was. She came in, bearing a letter on a salver.

A large official envelope. From the Post Office, Ned viewed it indifferently. Broke it.

The letter from Julian which Peggy Grove (she was married now and gone to Australia) had posted on the fifteenth of April, stared him in the face.

Julian had made an error in the direction and the letter had been a great traveller. The surviving twin waited a while before opening it. Seven minutes, to be exact.

DEAR OLD NED,—

Pour forth I must and I haven't a soul but you, so here goes. I'm about to give you a surprise—a shock. But you must get over that feeling.

My marriage to Emmy Busshe can't come

off. She's charming; only when the moon rises the brightest star pales. My moon has risen. A woman with the face of Diana and the form of Venus. She's married. You won't approve, for you're an old-fashioned old Puritan. What next? She's Maurice Ransom's wife.

I own I'm sorry for this. But what's to be done? She married him in a moment of war stress.

So look here. *They* are not happy. If I married Emmy, loving Coral (her name is Coral) *we* shouldn't be happy. Four lives spoiled. For the sake of who or what? The devil is in me if I know.

Don't think I've not put up a fight. I stuck closer to Emmy than ever when first it came on. Coral is a religious woman. Calm, too. For what seemed a long time she was deaf to all I had to say. But like me, she's had to give way.

To describe her as a perfect lady would be absurd. She is so much more. When we are married. (Maurice will behave well, I'm sure), you must hold out your hand to my wife. You *must*.

My *tête-à-têtes* with Coral have been few. She is the most reserved woman I've met. I *have* kissed her. That's all. Not been kissed.

Emmy will soon get over it. I can't speak too admiringly of the dear. Why not have both?

If only I were not a Western! But when it comes to choosing between the two——

Maurice will find a nice girl with some money, and they'll have four children.

My soul is on fire. I understand Pygmalion. Oh, the rapture of breathing life into marble!

Now, Ned, remember we were what doctors call true twins. Don't sulk. Don't spoil my happiness.

My love to you, old man.

J. D.

P.S.—We leave for Paris to-night.

For many weeks Ned had been turning over in his mind the gloomy and, as it seemed to him, inexplicable circumstances of his brother's end. He was, as we know, convinced that Julian had met his death at another man's hand. And he had expected the solution of

the mystery to be a strange one. But not so strange as this. Was it—could it be—the solution?

On his first stupefaction followed a calm in which he seemed to think with peculiar quickness and clearness. As for the moral aspect of the affair he scarcely concerned himself with that. Julian had meant to do what did indeed seem to Ned a bad, base thing. But he was dead. We don't judge the dead.

Ned put himself in Maurice Ransom's place. Suppose he had discovered the truth about his wife and Julian. Ned was certainly old-fashioned, and he felt that if he was married the idea of shooting any man who proposed to steal his wife would come very natural to him. Only (and unfortunately, he mused, duelling is extinct) in fair fight. If however Maurice had done the deed he did it as an assassin. And putting aside other considerations had Maurice spunk enough even for that?

The cry that was heard, too! Did Maurice in cold blood conceive and carry out that detail? Counterfeit a shriek of startled horror with the man he had just killed lying at his feet? He had Jewish blood in him and Jews

can do extraordinary things, both good and evil. But Maurice. Of him was such coolness in crime thinkable?

Or was it Julian who shrieked as he fell, conscious for one moment that all he had grasped at was going from him? As this notion came up Ned felt in his heart a stab of bitter pain. But no. It is not when a man gets a bullet in his heart that he screams.

He recalled his visit to Maurice's studio, the odd, uneasy manner that had clung about him; he thought of the well-behaved, cold-looking yet somehow not innocent-looking, beautiful wife. In their comfortable little house, next the Roebuck Hotel, opposite Dangerous Corner, were they living with this double secret between them? Each with so much to conceal from the world outside and ever conscious of the whole truth, when they were together. He could believe it of Coral. She had struck him as being an exceptional person.

A ring at the hall-door. Hinchley appeared. "Mr. Ransom has brought round the picture, sir."

"Show him in."

For the second time we see Maurice enter a

room bearing his own camera study of Julian Demmean transferred to porcelain.

He relieved himself of the portrait, laying it carefully on the side-table near the door; and hurried up the room. Julian's rush sat better on him this time, it appeared more buoyant. Ned saw that either his mood had changed since their meeting in the afternoon or he was making a determined effort to appear cheerful.

"I should have sent the lad I employ," (some complacency here) "Captain Demmean," he said, "but I had unexpected business rather late and by the time I'd done the rascal had slipped off. Can I advise you, as I'm here, about the placing of the portrait?"

"Never mind about that," said Ned. "Sit down. I was wishing to see you."

"Has anything unexpected occurred, Captain Demmean?" said Maurice, with an altered face. He sat down.

"Something unexpected *has* happened," said Ned. He himself remained standing. "My brother's letter—the letter he wrote to me on the fifteenth of April—the letter regarded as lost—I have it."

Maurice turned white, then red. He looked

miserable. Something hangdog undoubtedly in his aspect. But guilty—tragically guilty? No.

The next moment was a nasty one for Ned. However he forged ahead.

“Forgive me,” he said. “Did you ever suspect that my brother was fond of your wife?”

“I never suspected it, Captain Demmean,” said Maurice, hastily. Yet he didn’t seem to be receiving information. He stole a cautious glance up at Ned. Who thereupon said with sudden roughness, “Well, it was so. They’d arranged to go off together. Now, what I have to point out to you is this. If you had any idea of the state of things between them the character you appeared in at the inquest is smashed up. You seem attached to your wife. In that case you were no longer my brother’s—hm—indebted friend. You had cause, to be his enemy.”

Maurice bounded from his chair. “Good God, Captain Demmean,” he exclaimed, “you think I shot him. Oh, how little you understand! You think that. Oh no, no. I harm a hair of his head! Good God! You don’t understand. I love my wife—I do indeed—

but Mr. Demmean was part of my life in a way she'll never be—never. I can't remember a time when his distinguishing me as he did wasn't my chief pride—my greatest joy. In everything I did and thought he seemed in the foreground, as it were. The world's only half a world now he's gone. How wonderfully bright he was—what a brightness came from him! Me! Besides, I told you I never suspected anything—not then. It wasn't till a month after his death I came—in a most unlooked for way—not to *suspect*, but to *know*."

There was no mistaking Maurice's sincerity. His perspiring and trembling rather alarmed Ned; he remembered about the weakish heart.

"I believe you," he said quickly. "Don't get so upset. Easy. Easy. Sit down here—the lounge chair. Lean back. No, sit up. You're better sitting up. There. Brandy perhaps. I'll ring."

"No, no," Maurice protested. "I'm all right now. Don't ring, Captain Demmean, on any account. Don't have anyone in."

"I'll fetch something."

"Quite unnecessary. Pray don't. Oh, Captain Demmean, these hands have no blood on

them"—he looked at them; they were nice hands, with common, ugly nails anxiously cared for—"but I've been terribly placed."

"Yes."

Ned had been by the lounge-chair, helping Ransom. He now seated himself close by. "How did you come to know it?" he asked.

Maurice blew his nose. His handkerchief was slightly scented.

"I must make a thorough confidant of you, now," he remarked.

"I think you'd better."

"My wife had a sharp attack of influenza a month after the death. One night the fever ran high and I sat up with her. She was delirious. She let it all out."

"You've forgiven her then?"

"She doesn't know I know it."

"Not!"

"No. It's this way. If she knew I know *she* wouldn't forgive *me*. She'd never put up with the position. Too haughty."

He slid down to the foot of the lounge-chair which was towards the fire and rubbed his cold hands. Ned had started smoking. He pushed his cigarette case at Maurice. "No," said

Maurice, "Dr. Pinney's knocked me off cigarettes. He says—'one pipe a day,' and I've had my pipe." He looked round at Ned. "You know she didn't care particularly about Mr. Demmean," he said.

"What's that?"

"No. She didn't. *She wants to get into good society.* I must say it seems to me only natural to progress; I'm fairly ambitious myself, but with her it's a mania. The night of her fever, that was all she was on about. What her position would be—divorce had ceased to be any disgrace—the old name Demmean is—Mr. Demmean's property—what she'd do—where she'd live—a lot like that. One tender thought? Not one. Mr. Demmean was peculiar—so she said—but she'd be able to manage him. No fear of his not marrying her. She knew how to ensure that. How could she be so callous, I wonder. The first woman I ever knew who wasn't wax to his flame. Why, she spoke more affectionately of me than of him. She did. *Poor Maurice is a good chap. Sorry, Maurice.* I sat there and heard her say it."

Now that Maurice's idea of the gentlemanly

brilliant character he wished to appear had been driven out by the working of real feeling, now that he was simply, even thankfully, relieving his mind—he became interesting.

As he sat there with ruffled hair and reddened face, Ned was reminded of a winter evening at Randal's Hope (his grandmother's place in Cumberland) when the three of them, aged nine, discussed over the fire in the hall the question, Had or had not a certain joint crime been discovered? Would the mistress of Randal's Hope in the morning tell the coachman to thrash all three boys? Such was the old lady's brave notion of discipline.

Ned forgot how the affair ended. It was the one firelight moment came back so clearly; the extreme gravity of the situation; Maurice on the brink of tears; Julian's exquisite face with the tongue out in affected defiance; his own stony sensations as he laid his head against the hard strong-smelling side of the aged great buff-coloured mastiff sitting with them.

He had a kindlier movement towards Maurice than he would have thought possible a while back.

"It was an unnerving experience for you," he said.

"Yes. But it explained everything."

"How—everything?"

"*His* melancholy and the suicide."

"I don't see that."

"Don't you?"

"No. With the cup just at his lips to dash it down——"

"Oh, but Captain Demmean, he had a good—a beautiful side to his nature. The feeling of how dishonourably he was acting by me—the cruelty to Miss Busshe—yet he couldn't refrain—*must* get what he desired or die—and that in the end *was* the end; he did die. He was torn in two and unable to stand it."

With Julian's letter in his pocket which was so far from bearing out Maurice's theory, Ned shook his head.

"My conviction is only strengthened by this," he said.

"What?" said Maurice, turning on him in surprise and speaking almost in a whisper, "have you always thought it wasn't suicide?"

"Yes."

"You're mistaken, Captain Demmean."

"Time will show."

"Is it what Gaywood said about the magnolia you're thinking of? Because I'm a bit of a horticulturist and I agree with Mr. Grant's gardener that the injuries to the magnolia were the storm's work. Surely we two ought to know better than a police-officer."

"Well, we shall see," said Ned quietly. "Meanwhile don't say anything about the line I take. I would rather the public didn't know what I'm after."

Maurice had a jerk through his whole body.

"Captain Demmean! That gives me my opening. I've a petition—call it a prayer if you like. The revelation in Mr. Demmean's letter—can you—will you—keep it close?"

"You don't suppose I would give a woman's secret away unnecessarily. But it's not quite a simple matter, you see. More view points than one."

"You're thinking of Miss Busshe," said Maurice, who could be very quick. "Wasting regrets on a man who'd virtually thrown her over. But, mark me, she's started towards recovery and if she gets this shock it'll throw her back. Kill her, perhaps."

Now this was what Ned thought. But he had a conscience which was a perfect plague to him and he knew well that he *wanted* to think so. Because, while he had looked to his close relationship to the devoted lover she had lost to help him with Emmy, the fact that he was the brother of the man whom only death had stopped from jilting her might ruin him with the girl. So he couldn't quite trust himself in the matter.

"I must take time to consider," he said, rather dismally.

Maurice burst out again.

"Then consider this with the rest. I only ask to live a happy, comfortable life with my wife; we've had differences, I don't deny it; I want children and Coral doesn't; and then she would have it I was pleased when her mother died and one thing and another—— But since—— since the tragedy in this house she's been different. Wonderful how she took it. When I got home after finding him"—Maurice stopped and gulped—"when I got home," he went on, "she'd heard of it. As I've told you, I'd not the faintest idea *then* she'd any interest out of the common in Mr. Demmean. So on I ran,

getting it all off my chest, and she didn't say much; just '*How shocking—How terrible—Poor Miss Busshe*'—the flat things women always say; but still, it's had an effect on her. She seems to have settled down domestically and she's nicer to me. More come-at-able. Now, if the truth about Mr. Demmean and her comes out, everything of that sort's knocked on the head."

Ned sat frowning. The situation was singularly complicated. As he meditated, his glance fell on the volume of Dante which he had laid down on the fireside table, open at the first page of the poem. He read:

In the midway of this our mortal life,
I found me in a gloomy wood, astray,
Gone from the path direct: and e'en to tell
It were no easy task, how savage wild
That forest, how robust and rough its growth—

Ned had a half smile. The passage seemed appropriate. He looked at Maurice's anxious face. "Look here," he said, "I give you my word that unless anything quite unforeseen happens the fact shall——"

"Sleep?" suggested Maurice.

“Yes, sleep; for two months. Then we’ll talk it over again.”

With this Maurice had to content himself. What helped him to do it was his growing consciousness of the good change in Edward Demmean’s manner towards him.

Ned got up and mended the fire. Turning round, still holding on to the poker, “And now,” he said, “will you tell me one thing more? Do you know of anyone beside my brother who at about the same time might possibly have been feeling a special interest in Mrs. Ransom?”

“I see what you’re driving at,” said Maurice. “No. I don’t know of a soul. Coral isn’t a flirt. Very quiet, on the contrary. The only man she’s been friendly with besides Mr. Demmean is Mr. Sim, the Vicar of old Daunt parish church, All Saints’. And he’s a man past fifty—an ascetic—and has a reputation above everything. *His* friendliness doesn’t mark a woman out. He’s friendly with all his flock, and it’s mostly women.”

Ned nodded. Maurice rose. Some moments passed; each of the young men thinking his own thoughts.

Maurice said quietly, "Words can hardly say, Captain Demmean, how fully I forgive—*him*. But, you see—don't you?—I couldn't take the money."

Ned patted him on the shoulder.

Chapter IX

WE know already that Alfred and Lottie Swanell, Grant's housekeeper and indoor man, took good care of themselves. They had the earliest and the latest fires; and while Ned Demmean and Maurice Ransom sat talking over theirs, which was only newly lighted, the boy who helped Swanell brought into the hot little housekeeper's room at Rufus Lodge a fresh scuttle of coals; in spite of the sun, that fire had been going all day.

Rose was there, having looked in on her way back from Dr. Pinney's.

"How's the mother?" Lottie was saying.

Rose waited to answer till the boy had gone out.

"Very quiet," she then said.

Leah Swanell, after being absent nearly all the summer, had come back home in the last week of September.

"She's not favoured *us* with a call," said Lottie.

"She doesn't do much but ramble in the Park," said Rose.

"What about the *Bunch of Grapes*?" Alfred Swanell enquired. He was smoking his pipe in the high-backed arm-chair. His relief jacket of light grey alpaca was unbecoming.

"I don't believe she's been there once," said Rose, "and I think I should know."

"Smell it, wouldn't you?" said Lottie. Rose glanced away. Lottie sometimes seemed to her unbearably coarse.

"I like this article," said the unconscious Lottie, holding up a silver coffee-pot she was cleaning. "Mr. Grant's parents left him a lot of nice things. A pity he's not married."

"Never will be," said Alfred.

"No telling."

"Poh! *He* don't want a woman tagging after him."

"Come to think, *I* don't want one tagging after me," laughed Lottie. "I'd rather be my own missus when all's said and done."

Rose was sitting opposite to her brother. While he and his wife talked she was listening intently but not to what they were saying. The door between the body of the house and the

kitchen quarters was open. So was the room door a little bit.

The sound of Grant's chamber organ came in. Rose closed her eyes. She imagined herself in the music-room, standing near him, as when in the old days he had tempted his aunt round. Surely she knows this music. Isn't it his favourite Bach?

Alfred drew up his knees. "What a draught! Go and see if the passage door's open, Lottie."

She bounced off, she was in a good humour.

"It ought to be a swing-door, felted," she remarked, as she returned, pulling the room door behind her.

My life, thought Rose. A waft of glorious music; and then the door of communication is closed.

It was hot—stifling. She got up to go. "Stop to supper," urged Lottie.

Rose declined. She hurried on her coat and hat. A thin, pleasing figure.

"Rose keeps her appearance," remarked Lottie when she was gone.

"She's stuck up," said Alfred.

"Dresses quiet enough."

"That's part of it. And so's her church-

going. Chapel's not smart enough. The old Countess spoiled Rose."

And Rose was thinking, as she passed through the autumn-smelling dark of trees and of evening to the gate, What a fool I am! Despicable. Why do I go and see Alfred and Lottie? I don't care for them. But I'm near *him*. Fool. Fool.

The music-room window was open. Faintly the strains reached her. She stood a moment.

Yet why a fool?—she wondered. Why not love the finest man I know? What if it's wisdom? The folly would be if I'd ever dreamed *he* would think of *me* except in an ordinary way. No, I'm no fool.

The music stopped. She couldn't see the lighted, now silent, window, it was round at the side of the house. A momentary temptation; just to tiptoe round and give the window a look; then she made haste to the gate.

There some one was waiting for her. Hinchley, deciding that he wasn't likely to be wanted for anything, had strolled aimlessly forth. He saw Rose go in at Rufus Lodge. Aimlessness ceased. He stationed himself at the gate. He had waited half an hour.

When Rose, at the age of sixteen, came to wait on the Contessa at Como, Hinchley, then twenty, was already installed there as handy man. He became attached to Rose. His feelings were calm, they didn't interfere with his appetite or sleep, but though unencouraged he had been faithful for fifteen years.

"Good evening, Rose." He stepped forward.

"Good evening," she said, not unkindly. "A nice night."

"Yes."

He walked beside her. And made a feeble attempt to take hold of her arm. "No," she said. "You know I prefer to be independent."

"Don't you think you've been independent long enough, Rose?"

"I'm not tired of it."

"Why, you must be twenty-eight."

"Past thirty."

"There!—Rose, is it true what your brother Alfred says, that you won't look at me because I'm a servant?"

"No."

"Oh! Because I was thinking a small general shop is a need in the Regent's Road and

your cottage fronting that way, if Mr. Grant, being the landlord, didn't object, a few alterations would make a tidy little shop of it and we could start without upsetting your mother. I know she clings to All Saints' Alley."

"Where's the capital to come from?"

"I've saved. Now Rose, what do you say?"

"Nonsense."

"I'd make you so happy. I'm a total abstainer."

Rose had a sense of humour. She smiled in the semi-obscurity. The moon, one day past the full, was not up yet and the Daunt Road lamps in 1920 were still economically dim.

"You'll make a splendid husband," said Rose. "Find some one who wants to be a wife. I'll be godmother to the first girl and then there'll be a Rose Hinchley smaller and nicer than me."

Hinchley sighed audibly. They had got to the top of All Saints' Alley. "Good night," said Rose and offered her hand.

"Rose, why ever won't you?" Hinchley inquired.

"Because I was born an old maid."

She smiled again as she ran up the alley. She had other wooers beside Hinchley and

didn't mind having them. Being sought after seemed to make her worthier to worship John Grant.

Letting herself in with her latch-key she lighted the gas in the kitchen. Was her mother out or gone to bed? A voice called from above.

"Rose."

She went up. Her mother's room, the room in which Leah's four children had been born, was always untidy once Leah was in it, whatever Rose might do. The old woman liked things on the floor. Yet she had an eye for beauty. There was a jug on the mantel-shelf with ruby-berried autumn boughs sticking out from it.

Leah was lying dressed on her bed. She sat partly up as her daughter came in.

"Is this true, what I hear, Rose?" she said.

"What, mother?"

"About John Grant."

"What about him?"

"That they've made him a magistrate."

"Yes."

"Then he's art and part with the gang that killed my Jimmy," Leah cried out.

"No, mother, no." (It was useless to tell Leah that her darling had died in the prison

infirmary, well looked after. Her delusion on the point was incurable.) "You're thinking of long ago," said Rose soothingly. "The gentlemen that were magistrates in poor Jimmy's time are all dead and gone."

"Gone to hell," said Leah.

Rose pointed to the mantel-shelf.

"Look at your berries! I never saw such beauties. Where *have* you been?"

"Where have *you* been? In John Grant's house?"

"We're in his house now," said Rose, flushing, "and at half the rent we'd pay anywhere else for the same accommodation."

"I love the house," said Leah, wildly. "The house where when I come back I see a light in the window. That was your father's notion. Poor chap! God rest him."

"Yes, mother. Amen. And he worked all his life for our Mr. Grant and his father and he thought no end of them, didn't he?—and your pension—that comes from Mr. Grant," coaxed Rose; but she made a mistake in going back to the subject.

"Curse him," said Leah in a loud voice, "Curse the magistrate!"

Chapter X

A WEEK went by, the first week of October. Like a sword out of its sheath a bright day had sprung from mist; at half-past three in the afternoon Coral Ransom, standing at the open front-door of her villa, seemed to be enjoying the sun; but she wasn't conscious of it; thinking too intently.

Coral was the daughter of a pretty, innocent-minded, gentle young lady's maid who always felt certain that her mistress's only son would have married her when she told him a child was coming—his child—only he was killed in a railway accident before she knew it herself.

His mother was kind, however, believed what she said, and took her back six months after the child's birth. The old lady (she married late) never saw Coral till she was two. Then she was so delighted with her beauty that she said the mother might have the little girl with

her under the style and title of an orphan niece.

And at the age of ten Coral was sent to a good boarding school. Three years later the old lady died. She had meant to provide for the child, but death surprised her in between two wills and her legitimate heirs saw no reason why they should bother.

Coral's mother sickened at the thought of strange service. She married an old admirer, a builder in a small way, at Southsea, her native place. He gave the little girl his name, Hamilton; and she was able to call Mrs. Hamilton mother. That was something.

Coral didn't care about the things she was supposed to learn at school; but at thirteen her character was singularly mature; she came away with what was not a dream but a resolution; she would, she must be a lady.

Fate was unkind. As time went on her beauty brought her only proposals which were either not good enough or dishonourable. When the war broke out she went in for bomb-manufacturing. Maurice Ransom was superintendent of her department in the vast place she worked in. He fell in love with Coral and

after some months of indecision she married him. Not for love; she loved no one but her mother. But she was tired, her nerves went wrong; the treats Maurice Ransom gave her set her up; she came to associate him with escape from suffering. So it happened. They both romanced a bit about their origin. When the truth came out neither could very well find fault. Maurice was for a time too much smitten to care. Coral cared. She felt she had thrown herself away.

But she made the best of it. Photography had always attracted Maurice, and when no more bombs were wanted it was Coral who suggested his starting a business in the suburbs, on high lines.

Once settled at Daunt she began working her way up. The High Church banner had lately been unfurled at All Saints'. She enlisted and it was a great help to her. The best of it was she really was High Church. Only she had never before done anything special in consequence.

At first her appearance was against her. Women shrank from one so handsome. Coral knew she simply must gain the women. What

could the men do for her? Oh, what pains she took not to flirt with them! And by degrees her prudence told. There were smiles for her at churchy rendezvous; handshakes; at last patronizing admission to one or two select private houses. Still, slow was the work.

Then came her mother's illness and death. She had always been a safeguard to Coral. Keep straight, keep straight, my dove, that was the cry of the mother who hadn't kept straight; and Coral would have hated to grieve her. Now that check was gone. She came home in a bitter mood, scorning a world in which a creature so pure and devoted had been humiliated, overlooked, cast away; angry because, though he tried to hide it, she saw Maurice thought Mrs. Hamilton's decease a propitious event; *his* old butler father (to whom he had always been kind) had had the grace to quit several years back.

Yes, she was bitter, she was fierce-feeling, when she met Julian Demmean and his sudden, desperate passion confronted—enveloped her. She liked his adoration; it gave her a sense of power; and power was very dear to her. But Maurice was right; she didn't care for him.

Her temperament was frigid and she thought him so odd! Still, as she said to herself in rather a cruel soliloquy, it's surely better to have the master than the man.

His death was a terrible shock, but the necessity for concealment helped her to face the thing out. Nor was she a person with whom regret could ever last long. She had to be up and doing.

Back to her old tracks she went, plunging deeper than ever into parish activities; and her experiences had assisted her development; she was more knowing socially. Maurice's camera studies, which were in truth excellent, began to take; he specialized in life groups; the summer had been favourable both to husband and wife.

And so Coral was cheerful this afternoon as she stood at her own hall-door, laying her own plans, and when Captain Demmean passed by on the other side of the road she smiled and nodded; friendly, not too friendly; she liked seeing his hat sweep the air; she said to herself, watching him down the road, "How little he dreams that I was very nearly his sister-

in-law!" It struck her that she had been wonderfully protected. No one knew her secret.

Leaving her happy in this delusive conviction we pass on with Ned Demmean.

Ned hadn't let the grass grow under his feet. He had spent two evenings at Fir Bank and called once in the afternoon.

The evenings were everything and nothing. He went the first time, hoping Grant wouldn't be there, but he was; and Ned learned that Emmy always sat by her father while he and Grant played chess, watching Busshe's game. So his natural lot would have been to talk to Miss Watkyn; only Grant asked him if he would like to learn to play; a ready yes from Ned; he was posted at Grant's elbow. Frank Busshe quite liked the novelty and as they played Grant explained things to his pupil with a clearness and an absence of swank which ought to have suited the younger man. Ned, however, was still only conscious of objecting to him.

Never mind. He was close to Emmy and she was quiet and sweet; there was no aiming at vivacity for his benefit; slender and white

as a wax taper in her evening frock she seemed to breathe gently as a flower at his side.

The pity was that Francis Busshe told him to come again for a lesson and named the evening. One of Grant's evenings. Ned wanted to try a different development. And in the afternoon when he called Emmy was out.

To tell the truth he had now rambled forth with no definite idea beyond the one which haunted him—he might meet her. Not once had he so far had any luck. But as he neared Fir Bank the niece and the aunt came out at the gate and bore towards him. They were arm-in-arm.

Ned turned and walked alongside of them. He was in high favour with Miss Watkyn.

She remarked in gratified accents that they were taking him out of his way. He said he had no way—no more than a stray dog.

They came in sight of the Ransom abode. Coral had progressed; she was at the gate now; and the Rev. Ludovic Sim, in his black uniform of a soft hat which cleverly contrived to look Popish, stood talking to her.

Miss Watkyn could no longer reasonably attempt to avoid contact with the Ransoms either

for herself or Emmy. The pair had made too much way for that. But she disliked the upstairs, as she called them, more not less on that account.

"We won't stop," she remarked. "*I* hate gossiping in the road. And we're in a hurry."

She loved gossiping, quite irrespective of locality, and they weren't in a hurry; still, Benny felt as if she was telling the truth.

Mr. Sim, however, sprang on them with knock-you-down cordiality. Miss Watkyn was already his property, so to speak, and he wished to annex her niece, and he had called on Captain Demmean the day before and got from him with the greatest ease a handsome subscription for the All Saints' Branch of the Boy Scouts, so all deserved his smiles; his broad dark face with the ugly strong features was radiant; his burly form, which looked little like that of an ascetic, though he really was one, stopped up the path. "Hullo—hullo—hullo"—three shake-hands. "We weren't going to interrupt your *tête-à-tête*," said Miss Watkyn.

"Now, don't be scandalous, Miss Watkyn. Virginity is lovely—worshipful—but virgins you know, are sometimes *that*." He laughed

loud. Miss Watkyn would have deemed it indecent in anyone else to call her a virgin. Mr. Sim might say anything. He looked at Ned Demmean. "We were discussing our great Sale for the new Mission Room which comes off next week," he informed the young man.

By this time Miss Watkyn had grudgingly bowed to Coral and Emmy had given her a languid little hand and a faint smile and in spite of Miss Watkyn a stationary group was formed around the All Saints' Studio garden gate.

"There are to be twelve lady sellers," Sim trumpeted on, "and they're all going to represent Queens. Admission will be charged for."

"Queens!" ejaculated Miss Watkyn.

"Yes." Mr. Sim looked hard at Emmy. "Miss Busshe," he said, "one of our sellers has disappointed us. Now, will you be a Queen? Do."

He softened his manner very much in speaking to the young girl.

"Me?" said Emmy absently.

"You. You. Why not? Why not help?"

Benny was up like a fussy old hen protecting a chicken. "Emmy dislikes publicity."

"D'you never do what you dislike, Miss Busshe?" demanded Sim, still very gently though. "Never," cried Emmy with sudden animation, and forth came her quick nervy smile and her hazel eyes grew larger; she seemed all eyes and smile. "But of course I'd like to be a Queen," she went on. "What Queen?"

"That was just the question," said Sim, concealing a triumphant feeling and turning to Coral. "You and Mrs. Ransom are left rather high and dry, I fear. Mary of Scots, Marie Antoinette, Elizabeth, Boadicea, Queen of Hearts—all the best sellers—is that a pun?—eh?—gone."

At this moment, on the other side of the road, Grant appeared. He was walking fast and either did not see or didn't seem to see the social cluster at Maurice Ransom's gate. The road happened to be clear of traffic. Emmy called sharply across, as she might have done at thirteen—"Uncle Jack!"

Grant was Granty at Fir Bank, Uncle Jack elsewhere.

He came over at once. His eye took in the group.

Coral Ransom, thinly black-robed, most striking; her hair one glitter in the sun; aspect composed. Miss Watkyn stuffing out a grey mantle, her favourite feature slightly elevated. Emmy in a little blue serge coat and skirt and plain cap drawn forward; her shadowy look, her burning look; a slight tremor round the mouth. The Rev. Ludovic Sim hovering round the women like a great crow. Edward Demmean on the edge of things, with a heavy, unpleasant expression in his face.

He was feeling unpleasant. Just as simply as if he'd been fifteen or sixteen he was craving for circumstances which would give him a chance with Emmy. All this smother and pothor! He thought of Mespot. Beastly Mespot. Yes; but a hazardous situation with that setting rose in his mind. Emmy, the centre of it. And he, well armed, on the horse he preferred—— He met Grant's observant eye and coloured up as if the man could read his thoughts. His absurd thoughts. Meanwhile Sim, with flourishes, was laying before Grant the "Queens" dilemma.

Grant must have been surprised to hear that

Emmy had consented to help in the Mission Room Sale. He made no comment.

Very polite, with that sort of politeness which is the best protection of the reserved, a trifle nonchalant, the slight smile which always seemed to have a hint of sarcasm in it on his face, he turned to Coral Ransom. "Queen of the Night?" he said. "The Moon? An astronomer's idea, you see."

Some people said Grant believed in nothing but astronomy. Others thought he was secretly a Roman Catholic. Though why secretly? Sim wasn't small; he didn't mind all that. But it did vex him that in his liberality which, for his means, was munificent, Grant should make no distinction between Church and the chapels. If he had been anyone else Sim would have attacked him about it. But Grant was himself, so he didn't. Altogether their personal relations were formal.

"That's it!" shouted Sim. "Mrs. Ransom, you're suited. You have the Diana phiz."

Ned thought of the passage in Julian's letter—*The face of Diana, the form of Venus*. His annoyance increased. The sight of Coral Ransom close to Emmy Busshe jarred on him.

Come away. Come away. Lift those divine little feet from Daunt's dirty asphalt and come with me. Away! Away! Where shall it be? Choose. Come.

Outwardly he looked sulkier and sulkier.

Grant looked at Emmy. "You liked Hans Andersen when you were young," he said. "What's the matter with the Snow Queen?"

Emmy nodded toward him.

"Benny, I'm the Snow Queen," she said.

Coral was seeing herself a real vision.

"I can manage my dress quite cheaply," she said with a modest air. "Thank you, Mr. Grant."

"And now—Uncle Jack," questioned Emmy, "where were you going so fast?"

"To call for your father. We——" Ned missed the rest.

"Oh!" Emmy cried, "take me along. Come, Benny. *We* were going nowhere." Hasty good-byes; in one moment between her real aunt and adopted uncle she was gone.

Sim rushed off to blow as if with bellows hope and help into the wreck of a clever young wheelwright shell-shocked in the war. He didn't leave the poor to his curate.

Coral went in.

Ned lounged disgustedly along. Although there could be no serious jealousy on his part of a man who liked being called Uncle, his predominant sensation was, Damn Grant. He was in the main a good-natured fellow and all this was unlike him. But love loads us with faults as well as virtues not our own.

He came to a side-entrance into the Park and went in. It was a new region to him. After some time of discontented blind roving he stood still. Looked round. A silent spot. Beautiful. And (so it seemed) familiar. That he couldn't understand.

Long grass levels stretched away to meet a yellow sky. Close at hand trees were grouped in a half-circle; nay, it was more than a half one. They held their green yet; a lush sober green; only one felt it was going. Some fifty paces off stood an oak that had been struck by lightning. The great trunk with the young shoots, the dreary blackened top caught the last sun rays.

Ned suddenly remembered why he knew the scene. It was one of those Julian had chosen to photograph with Maurice Ransom's help.

Yes, in the study at Como the framed picture hung with two others. The dip in the ground, the blasted oak, the high trees almost bare—early, early spring——

“Is it Captain Demmean?”

A woman’s voice, clear and firm, asked the question.

He turned round.

A tall woman, nearer seventy than sixty, stepped forward. Ned had an excellent memory for faces. People who knew them both well saw no likeness between Rose and Leah. But Ned, the stranger, perceived at once that this must be the mother of the young dress-maker he had seen for a moment at Dr. Pinney’s. Certainly it was Leah Swanell. And her voice and figure and movements impressed him in an unlooked for way. He could believe what Pinney had said; that Leah was a remarkable character.

Leah has not changed since the spring. Her dress is the same but she wears a black straw hat with a red rose in it.

In answer to her question—“I am Captain Demmean,” said Ned, and moved his cap in deference to age and sex.

Leaning on her stick Leah looked at him hard. "You're not as handsome as your brother, Captain," she remarked.

"No," said Ned.

"A luckier face, though."

"Is that so?"

"Ay! D'you know where you are?"

"Scarcely."

"Great Oak Dip. It's a pretty, pretty spot. I've no quarrel with kings like some people. The King lets me walk here. Do places mind you of people, Captain?"

"Not this place. I'm new to it," said Ned. He was very willing to listen to Leah. Not only did she interest him in herself but he hoped for further mention of Julian.

"And I'm old to it," she said with a strange inward look. "Old, old to it. I've always favoured Great Oak Dip. I remember—don't I—don't I remember!—coming this way years back, couldn't say how many; I'd my Jimmy with me, a little chap"—she indicated with one hand the height of a child of eight or nine—"we met here, just here; Francis Busshe and his wife and John Grant, walking together; the three of them. Mrs. Busshe stopped and

spoke, she knew me well. She was an angel. She kissed Jimmy and praised him for the man he looked. Young Mrs. Busshe was an angel. She'd only to speak and the restlessness died in me. It was summer time and I looked and the grass seemed a deeper green and the trees to stand more solemn and the light and the shadows lay out before me like a dream. A dream; a dream; it's we are the dream. The trees and the grass ground are with us yet and the summer light and the shadows come back and back and back to Great Oak Dip; but where's young Mrs. Busshe?—where's—where's my Jimmy?"

Ned was speechless. Her emotion disconcerted him.

"You're about the age he'd a'been," she said, suddenly becoming quite composed. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-seven."

"That's it. Then was you and the one that was shot twins?"

"Yes."

"Poor chap. He was as bright as the sun. I say! They talk of the sun going down in blood. So did he. Poor chap. And there's a

secret; some secret about it. Did you know?"

Ned's heart gave a plunge. He stepped close and looked into her face. "What secret?" he said.

She didn't budge; but her expression changed as if by magic to utter vacancy.

"Who are you staring at?" she said, with a silly smile. Ned shifted his ground. "I dare say my brother made friends with you," he said easily.

"He did. I used to see him about with little Emmy. Did you ever stand at All Saints' church gate, while the bells clamoured, and feel Emmy dance up and down, screaming for joy, and her hand in yours?"

Ned shook his head.

"Church bells," murmured Leah. "They're fine. I'm a Christian. Been baptized. Do I look like it? Rose don't like my hat."

"What's wrong with the hat?" said patient Ned.

"Ah! You've not your brother's silver tongue. But you've a steadier head. Of the two I'd rather trust a secret with you than with him. If he could speak now! Poor chap. What wouldn't he tell you? What wouldn't I

tell you if——” She brought her teeth together; the pale lips met over them; her head rocked. The mouth jumped open as if of itself.—“Or show you, eh?” she said. “Seeing’s believing.”

Ned remained silent.

“Twins. Twins. That’s close,” she whispered.

“If you know anything, for God’s sake speak out,” he said, unable to contain himself.

“Speak out? Out? Not out here, Captain. A bird of the air might carry the matter. Scripture says so.”

“Will you come and see me, Mrs. Swanell?”

“At Como?”

“Yes.”

“Ay. But I’ll not be looked over by your servants. I’m not speaking about Hinchley. He’s a good lad. It’s the petticoats.”

“Hinchley answers the door. When will you come?”

“My counsellors will tell me when.”

“Who?”

“My counsellors.”

“Who are they?”

“They don’t give their names.”

“Anyhow, is it a promise, Mrs. Swanell?” urged Ned.

“Ay. But what will people say to you receiving an old madwoman? Did you know I’m mad?”

She faced him close, opening her eyes strong and wide. What was it he saw in their depths? Cunning?

“You’ve wit enough for me, Mrs. Swanell,” he said quietly.

The mist was rising from the grass. Ned shivered. “Shouldn’t you get home?” he said. “You’ll take cold.”

“Nay, nay, what’s a bit o’ mist? Don’t it float like ghosts? But you go back to Como, Captain, and have Hinchley make your fire up and put your feet in the fender. You’ve the tail of a foreign sickness up your sleeve yet. A sickness—fever—far off—Asia——”

Her head dropped forward; she turned from him, stood motionless. Ned felt that if he spoke again she wouldn’t answer. He left her.

The unaccountable but very real influence of her presence being removed, he wondered—Wasn’t it all crazy rambling?

Yet that spark in the eye-depths!

Fraud? But she asked for nothing.

No doubt, Leah Swanell, with her gipsy connections and proclivities had some queer associates. Could the crime after all have been one of vulgar violence?

A ruffianly tramp finds his way to Como on the fatal morning; perhaps he only means to beg, but tempted by the deserted state of the place he penetrates to the study; Julian enters suddenly, and the thief is frightened first into murder, next into empty-handed flight.

Neither probable nor impossible.

Would Leah come to Como? Ned thought she would.

He was back in his own study. No; it never seemed his own. Julian's. He threw himself on the lounge-chair. The old gipsy's words sounded in his ears. "Blood. If he could speak! What wouldn't he tell you?"

The secretaire, the masked door hiding the little winding staircase to the bedroom above, the very floor where his brother had lain dead seemed charged as if with words that couldn't be got out.

And he saw the stoutish, plain, elderly woman caller in her brown dress and black mantle and green hat; and the creeping magnolia tree and the treasured key to the garden-door and the mutilated picture of the Iron Duke and the missing card and letter—yes—even the almost new umbrella out of the hall all lay before him as if shaken from a Chinese puzzle-box. It was more than he could stand. He felt intolerably alone. Off he went to the Pinneys. Dined there. The doctor and still more, if possible, Eve his wife, made a great big fuss of Ned and it did him good.

Chapter XI

IT was the following Saturday. Evening. Eight o'clock. In the dining-room at Rufus Lodge, Maurice Ransom was waiting to see Grant. One day in the summer Grant stopped to admire a choice rose-bush in the Ransoms' front garden. Maurice had now walked round with some cuttings. Mr. Grant was engaged at this moment, said Alfred Swanell; he had just been called away to see a gentleman in the library. But when Maurice explained his errand Swanell seemed to think he would be a welcome visitor; so here the young man sat.

The dining-room is square; moderate sized; two deep-set windows framed in creepers not yet bare of leaf are open; the dark evening looks in. The present John Grant's father used this room a great deal. His son has altered nothing. The room bears the stamp of the old man's character. The furniture is

old, dark, handsome with plainness; from the clock on the chimney piece to the door-weight, everything harmonizes. Integrity; exactitude; firmness; success well deserved and calmly enjoyed—how does the room contrive to speak of these things?

There is no electric light, not even gas; the light comes from a beautiful French Second Empire lamp on the sideboard.

Grant likes for his dinner a cut of good meat, another of cheese and then fruit and two or three small glasses of wine from his father's deep-stocked cellars. He hadn't quite finished. Maurice looked doubtfully at the melon and sweet biscuits and wine on the mahogany table. The one glass was half-full, the one plate had a slice of melon in it. He wondered, ought he to have come? Would it have been better form to send the rose-cuttings? He fidgeted on his chair.

Then he began thinking of the last time he had seen this room and his thoughts stilled him.

It was on the morning of the fifteenth of April when after the terrible discovery at Como he tore round to get Grant's aid. He

saw himself pulling like a madman at the old-fashioned front door bell; Alfred Swanell's staring eyes as he opened the door; breathless, Maurice asked for Grant; Mr. Grant had only that moment returned from the sale at Cotterell, said Swanell; he opened the door of the dining-room, but glancing in and seeing it empty, Maurice panted out, "I can't wait—Mr. Demmean is shot——" Swanell's conceited little visage broke up and then the door of the library opened and Grant, with Dr. Pinney behind him, appeared at it.

"Who the devil was that ringing?" Grant's face had a cold, severe look.

At the tidings—no emotion, none at least that was shown.

When they got round to Como; when they stood in the study and the doctor said, "He has been dead quite half an hour,"—Maurice could think only of himself and Julian Demmean; the other two, he felt, were thinking of Miss Busshe. Maurice wept; he wished not to, but he did. He remembered that.

And the home-coming, the smell of the wall-flowers in the window-boxes, Coral reading a novel in her black dress. He saw now that was

a bit of over-acting; the book; it wasn't natural for her to be reading, having just heard of Mr. Demmean's death; not even supposing they'd only been acquaintances.

Now he returned to the present. Looked about him again, wishing he hadn't come.

But as the clock on the chimney-piece struck the quarter to nine, Grant walked in.

He liked the rose-cuttings. Maurice's uneasiness was at once set at rest. Grant showed his appreciation of the young man's attention very cordially. He was seen at his best in his own house; it really seemed a pity that he so seldom invited anyone to come there.

The real love of flowers they had in common gave the conversation a start-off.

Maurice Ransom sitting, sipping old Mr. Grant's choice wine, had a distinguished feeling which he enjoyed. It was altogether an enjoyable moment. He and Coral dined early; this evening both mistress and servant had been taken up with the Queen of the Night's dress for the Mission Room Sale; supper suffered. Maurice bore this trial well, he was very much interested in the dress, which he had designed himself; but the wine and

melon and sweet biscuits pressed on him later by Grant were distinctly acceptable.

He didn't drink wine as a rule. He knew he was better without it and he took great care of his health. Also of his earnings. He was putting by already for the two children he hoped Coral would give him some day; they were to have every advantage. A girl as beautiful as her mother, a boy just like himself. Plainly he saw them.

His habitual abstinence made the present little let-out quite a treat. He certainly didn't exceed. But unfortunately his head, where alcohol was concerned, was a weak one. The awe he felt of Grant vanished with his first glass. By the time he had finished his third he was talking for two. He was naturally talkative; cautious with it, though; but now caution went under.

He felt infinitely agreeable, indefinitely clever; it seemed to him that he was making a delightful impression on Grant. Nothing else mattered; even the horror that lived for him in the idea of Julian Demmean's sudden end faded away; his wise determination always, if possible, to avoid that topic was for-

gotten; he remembered only that he had something new and interesting to say in connection with the affair; something, too, which would show Grant that Edward Demmean confided in him—treated him as an equal.

“I was looking over the *Kaye and Daunt Times* before I came out,” he remarked. “In the Daunt Dottings column I saw something about Captain Demmean—what a benefit it would be for the neighbourhood if he were to leave the Army and settle down at Como!”

Grant’s keen still face expressed no special interest.

“Daunt’s hardly the place for a man of his age and type,” he said, as if feeling it incumbent on him to say something.

“Oh, he has no notion of stopping here,” said Maurice airily. “He’s at Como on a mission—a quest. He’s taken it into his head that his brother was murdered and he’s out to come up with the guilty party. Set on that, sworn to that. Thinks of nothing else.”

The light that reached the table from the lamp on the sideboard was subdued. And Grant had his back to the lamp. Still, if

Maurice's brain had not been slightly muddled he must have noticed and marvelled at a momentary but profound alteration in Grant.

He was sitting there, so cool, so quiet; motionless, as strong persons usually sit; it is the weak who fidget. Then—what was the change like?

While travelling with Julian Demmean Maurice Ransom had once been in a garden on an island; deep was the sky-blue, deeper the sea-blue; the walls of the garden were lined with Peruvian aloes; here and there rose a fairy fountain; and among the wild bushes of ilex and myrtle they came suddenly on what was really a pleasure-pavilion, though it looked like a temple. At the entrance stood a statue in marble. They stopped and viewed the figure. Would have asked themselves which of the Greek gods or heroes it represented, but there had not been time for that, when sickness and giddiness seized them both; it seemed to be caused by the fact that the statue on which their eyes were fixed had moved; yes, there had been an inclination forwards, so slight, it was barely perceptible; slight indeed, but actual;

and the portentous unexpectedness of the phenomenon—that, they believed, was what had affected their nerves, so as even to produce nausea.

Afterwards they found that both the shaking of the statue and their own sensations had had the same cause; a very mild earthquake shock.

Now Grant's movement was like the movement of the statue; almost nothing; yet it was, as the statue's tremor had been, subtly fraught with sinister import. A sign. Maurice missed the sign. But, strangely enough, its magnetism got to the inward part of him and he felt there, without having the least notion why, a chill, an alarm. Which completely sobered him; and he remembered his promise of silence to Edward Demmean.

"You won't repeat this, Mr. Grant," he said anxiously. He looked rather abject.

"Certainly not," said Grant. He had righted himself. "Has Captain Demmean any definite ground for suspicion?" he said quietly.

"No, oh no," Maurice assured him. "It's just a notion founded on his opinion of his

late brother's character. That's what is setting him to work."

"I see. Something very natural in the feeling. But he'll waste his time, I fancy."

"So I told him. Trust me, I said, Mr. Demmean met his death by his own act."

Grant was holding his clenched right hand close to his eyes, examining it as if absent-minded; a sinewy but firmly modelled hand it was; with a seal-ring of considerable value bearing his crest, on the little finger. The ring had been his father's.

Maurice left, uncomfortable. Why had he blabbed? Wasn't it too bad not to be able to enjoy in moderation good wine which was costing you nothing without making a fool of yourself? Pettish with this grievance he kicked at the neat umbrella stand in the little entrance-hall of his villa; it seemed to be in his way. A loud voice called down to him from the upstairs landing.

"The neck-line's wrong. Come up and see."

Maurice was glad of the distraction. He found Coral before the long mirror in her bedroom, gloriously beautiful in her unfinished costume. Hilda, the maid, was holding pins.

Maurice soon rectified the error. He had a splendid eye. He wanted to throw the neckline lower in front than Coral would allow. She was unpersuadable. "Remember it's for a Mission Room," she said.

Chapter XII

ROSE SWANELL usually went to the evening service at All Saints'. On the Sunday following Maurice Ransom's Saturday evening call on Grant, she came out of her cottage and up All Saints' Alley at her wonted hour. Ten minutes to seven. But instead of turning towards the church she set off in the opposite direction, past the Wesleyan Chapel where she hoped her brother and his wife were safely stowed; past the idle boat-yard; past Dangerous Corner; past Como; she went in at the gate of Rufus Lodge.

A brand new kitchen girl came to the back door. The Swanells were at chapel.

Rose always dressed quietly, but her Sunday things happened to be new; they were modestly in the fashion and Rose looked younger and smarter than she did in the week. The girl admired her. When she said she was Alfred Swanell's sister, to admiration awe was added.

"I've called to see Mr. Grant," said Rose in a friendly tone. "We are his tenants, and I have to speak to him about our cistern, which leaks. Perhaps Sunday's an odd day to choose but I thought he'd be in."

"Yes, he's in, Miss Swanell, but he's in the music-room, and Mr. Swanell said when he was in the music-room he wasn't to be disturbed. What'll I do?"

"You needn't bother," said Rose kindly. "I was his invalid aunt's attendant, at one time, next-door, and he's quite used to me. I'll go and tap, and if he doesn't say 'come in,' I'll know he's absorbed, and then I'll come back here and wait a bit. I must see him, we're swamped."

Nodding, she went through the partition door.

The door of the music-room was ajar. A torrent of sound poured through. Oh, he would never notice her knock. Presuming on the urgency of her real errand (the cistern was only a pretext) she pushed the door and just entered the room.

There was the whole width of it between her

and Grant, as he sat at the organ with his back to her, playing hard.

Rose had no knowledge of music. But she was intensely sensitive to it. These sounds seized her, bore her away; yet she saw with singular distinctness Grant's figure seated all-powerful; above him, in graduated array, the solemn pipes lifting themselves aloft as if into another world; music-books were piled on either side of the player (but he was playing without notes) and close to his right hand a side-window opened to the stars.

The rich, mournful, violent music was trouble, a stormy, terribly towering sea; it changed and was rapture, a dancing earth; it cleared and was peace; unimaginable heaven. A note soared up which to Rose was like all the sweetness the past had ever given her saying, "Remember—remember"—but even as she heard it, that isolated tone was silenced; back, back into suffering rushed the spirit of the music; it roared, rebelled—suddenly there was a crash and Grant left the organ; walked a few steps as if in trance; then fell on his knees.

Aloud, but in a voice too low for the words

to be distinguishable where Rose stood he dashed into a prayer. Stop. Was this a prayer? Rose had never dreamed of one like it.

Oh, what an outpouring! How intimate, impassioned! The agonized soul strove, implored, fierce in strength, wild in weakness, humble in longing. Two words reached Rose. They were "pity" and "pardon." Horrified to find herself a listener she turned noiselessly and crept away.

She walked into the large, square, feebly-lighted hall; stood there leaning against the closed door of the dining-room. She would gladly have wept. The refrain of a song which the poor Contessa used to quaver through, when in good spirits, came to mind. "Men must work while women must weep." Not so in this case. She must work, she was here to work, and she drew off her gloves and felt at her blouse-fastening, and then went back to the music-room which was almost at the end of a passage opening out of the hall and having a small door on the garden.

The music-room door was still ajar; all was quiet; she knocked.

“Come in.”

Grant was standing at a centre-table strewn with music and books. He had dried his sweating face with his handkerchief, and looked—himself? Not quite. But unagitated; he had an expression partly tired, partly peaceful.

Rose came to end peace. No conventional salutation passed between them. Only a flash from eye to eye; then Grant went to the window, closed it and drew the curtains; he was about to lock the door, but refrained, remembering that if by any unforeseeable chance the fact of its being locked came to be known in the house, Rose Swanell's character was gone.

There they were alone together in the silent intimate-feeling music-room; the keen-minded, cultivated man of leisure and standing and the self-respecting young woman whose reputation stood as high in her own class of life as did Grant's in his. And to judge from their glances and movements they might have been American Indians of a tribe revengefully pursued in the old Indian wars by whites; two out of a handful of survivors meeting accidentally in some wild covert known to them both; the

enemy everywhere; tidings to be exchanged; but in a manner how guarded, how stealthy!

Grant returned to the centre-table, and took up and opened a folding map of the district; Rose stood close beside him. If anyone had come in he would have appeared to be directing her from the map.

The communications they murmured to each other were concise.

Rose began.

"I've bad news."

"I think I know it. This young man wants to quash the verdict of the Coroner's jury."

"He has scraped acquaintance with my mother."

Pause.

Then Grant said,

"Would she speak? If she did, after all, what has she to say?"

"It isn't what she might say. It's what she might show."

"You hoped she had destroyed—it."

"She let out to me this afternoon that she hid it somewhere."

Pause.

“To what extent is she really mad?” Grant inquired.

“The very question I’m always asking myself.”

“Where could it be hidden?”

“What if she had buried it in the waste piece of ground by the allotments?”

“Has she the strength?”

“She can do whatever she wants to do.”

“That is *my* ground—— Well, that’s no good, however. I mustn’t stir a finger. Does she say Edward Demmean questioned her?”

“She says he’s after her secret. She’s only lately grasped that you are now a magistrate. I thought I’d made all safe by telling her in the beginning she must hold her tongue for *your* sake. I wish I’d held *mine*. She’s turned against you—fancies she’d revenge Jimmy by injuring you—the magistrate. But it’s all confusion in her poor brain, she mixes everything up. I don’t think I’d fear her if it wasn’t for what she holds.”

“Or says she holds. Suppose her statement has nothing behind it——”

Rose shook her head. “Is the young man

making efforts in any other direction?" said Grant.

"Not that I know of. What can we do?"

"Watch and wait."

And then Grant laid the map down, turned round, and said in an ordinary conversational tone, "*Che sara sara*. As my poor aunt at Como used to say. You remember?"

"I wish I was as calm as you are," said Rose. "I mean"—(as the solitary struggle she had witnessed on her first arrival came back to her)—"as self-controlled."

"Don't wish yourself other than you are. Kindest, most steadfast, best of friends."

"Mr. Grant, I made an excuse about our cistern. So as to see you. It leaks."

"I'll send Hoppner to-morrow."

"Don't do that. I may want to come again and if you forget about it—why then—I come to remind you."

"So clever too!"

He turned as if to break off the interview; his eye sought the beautiful organ built into the wall. "I have a queer fancy sometimes, Rose," he said.

"What is that, sir?"

“My admirable little aide-de-camp, don’t call me sir. I feel as if, supposing I were dead and the next man to live here kept that organ on and used it—the organ would know. Well, I mustn’t keep you.”

Leaving the music-room Rose found the girl asleep over the kitchen fire, with a book Lottie Swanell had lent her, on the floor. She let herself out.

When she gets home she is not altogether unhappy. Her path in life diverged from Grant’s a long while back. Or at any rate it seems to her a long while. Now the two paths—hers and his—intersect again.

She does not deceive herself. Aide-de-camp. Best of friends. Proudly she accepts these titles.

She remembers a sunny summer afternoon when she was only eighteen, playing ball with little Emmy Busshe in the garden at Como, the Countess watching from her bath-chair. And Grant appears and little Emmy screams to him to join them, and he does. The flying ball, the laughter; once when the ball drops she and Grant both make for it; there is a collision.

The sun, the heart-beats, the ball.

Angrily she came to herself. Upstairs her mother was lying on her bed, smoking a pipe; Rose ran up and asked her about supper. She wouldn't have any. She ate little in these days.

Chapter XIII

IF Rose fell off on this Saturday from her evening attendance at All Saints', Ned Demmean, unwontedly for him, went to the morning service. Only with the idea of seeing Emmy. He knew where the Fir Bank ladies sat.

Their seats were vacant. But perhaps Ned got some good among the church-goers. For on his return home he began abusing himself for his unjustifiable feeling about Grant.

Francis Busshe might be an affectionate father but he was certainly a useless one. Why grudge his beloved the comfort and support she got from Busshe's one ally? Why? It was mean of him. Stupid too. The older man's friendship might be quite a help to him. He saw that.

Ned got on slowly at chess. Grant had offered to give him private lessons. Ned declined. Felt he didn't care to put himself under the obligation. Bearish.

Never mind, he now said to himself. To-morrow evening I'm due at Fir Bank. I'll make amends. Tell Grant if his proposal holds good I'll be thankful to accept it. Emmy too. I'll try to talk to her. After all I'm her cousin. The plan would be to get easy with her; just easy; and then by degrees— Get easy? Yes, but that's what's so difficult. Never seeing her, except hemmed in by father, uncle and aunt. Nowadays. Good Lord!

And with a frown he ruminated on the boundless accessibility of the other young Englishwomen he knew. While Emmy—— Why, they might as well be in Spain.

Dear old Ned! It doesn't strike you that if you and Emmy Busshe were for ever striding, smoking, swearing, supping, jazzing all over the place together, you might still be in love with her, no doubt, but your passion would lack just the ideal touch which makes it all-absorbing. Ah, Ned, you're so mad on the girl partly because you can't get at her.

Anyhow, having once resolved to change his behaviour, he felt pleased and hopeful; and when Monday evening came started off for Fir Bank earlier than usual. One misfortune of

his present course of life was that he had nothing to do.

The bead-eyed, button-mouthed young housemaid was out. The old cook let him in. Quite hypnotized by the notion of being pleasantly intimate all round, he said, "Don't show me up, Eliza, it's unnecessary," and ran up the stairs. Eliza being rheumatic, this did very well.

Fate favoured him. The drawing-room door was a bit open. To tell the truth if he'd had to open it he would have been nervous. Gently he entered.

Screens are delightful things. Well chosen and placed, they add to the beauty of rooms. But only the elderly should use them. Why? Because for persons still moving in the heart and heat of life screens bristle with danger.

The very handsome Fir Bank drawing-room screen (one of Grant's many presents by the by) was this evening drawn out to its fullest extent so that it all but divided the room into two halves. You may or may not remember that this screen had already played a part in Ned's relations with Emmy. When first he

called at Fir Bank and she came into the room it had for a minute or two prevented her from seeing him. That accident hadn't mattered particularly one way or another. But this time—— Getting sideway to the aperture, Ned was still invisible to the persons in the room; able, however, to take in the whole of the picture it presented. And the picture was this.

Emmy, fully dressed as the Snow Queen, stood at the fireplace end of the room, in front of the disproportionately large gilt-framed glass over the mantel-piece which had been one of her mother's wedding-gifts. Rose Swanell, kneeling on the floor, was running her hand along the edge of Emmy's skirt. Grant, at the other end of the room, stood leaning over the high narrow back of an old-fashioned chair. The room was lighted by a gas-burner on the wall near where Grant stood, and two more on either side of the glass. Only one of these was used as a rule, but on this occasion, Rose, in order for Emmy to see the full effect of her dress, had turned on the second burner.

The two girls had their backs to the room.

Emmy's face and her figure down to well below the waist were reflected in the glass.

So Ned had two views of the white apparition. Nearly all white it was. Emmy's chestnut hair was hidden under a peaked white cap. The slender, delicately draped figure with the snowdrop-white arms and neck seemed to rise from a snowdrift. The snowdrift was the skirt. The only colour was a clump of artificial holly berries in the front of the cap. Under this Emmy's thin face with its flashing eyes had on each cheek a flush which was like the finest rouge. She had crystals on her arms and neck and at the waist.

Glittering and cloudy, feverish and nonchalant, fragile but not weak, like a lighted candle fast consuming away in a draught, but burning all the brighter as long as it lasts, Emmy made a lovely yet a troubling spectacle. Ned felt himself sink a fathom or two deeper into his love, her aspect did so seize on him; then involuntarily he glanced at Grant.

Deeming himself safe, the girls having their backs to him, he too was wrapt in the double sight of Emmy. Wrapt? Ay. Where was Uncle Jack? Gone. A transformation had

passed upon Grant. He was gazing at Emmy with the almost intolerable tenderness, the frantic longing of passionate love.

Words may be misinterpreted. Not so looks. In his surprise Ned started back as if he had been shot.

Shot? An idea came which made it impossible for him to announce himself properly, to smile, to take Grant's hand.

He turned and went down the stairs again. Old Eliza was still fiddling about in the hall. "Tell them," he said in a low voice, "I no sooner got to the drawing-room door than I remembered——" He hesitated in his inborn horror of deceit. "The fact is I ought to be elsewhere," he said. That he felt to be true.

Eliza didn't bother one way or another. Ned got into the street.

He was unable to think as he hurried back to Como. Once in the study, the objects round him with their distinct train of association were a help, and he did think for a while—hard. Then rang. After an unusual delay Hinchley appeared. He was trying to learn to play an instrument called a melodeon, and while thus occupied in his pantry he had fallen

asleep. Mrs. Grove had had to rouse him when the Captain rang.

“Have you a good memory, Hinchley?”

“Yes, sir,” said Hinchley at random.

“You remember going to Farmer Norton’s sale at Cotterell on the morning of the fifteenth of April last?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Were you there from the beginning to the end?”

“I was. Mr. Demmean wished me to be.”

“Mr. Grant of Rufus Lodge was there.”

“Yes.”

“Did *he* stay to the end?”

“No.”

“About when did he leave? Don’t hurry. Think it over.”

“I’ve no call to think it over. Mr. Grant came to buy a mowing-machine, and he bought one and then went straight off.”

“How long before you?”

“An hour—good.”

“Sure?”

“Quite sure, sir.”

“Thank you.”

Hinchley went out.

Since the peace, Dr. Pinney had taken a third partner and was trying hard to retire. Not very successfully; but he did now get his evenings. On this special evening he was in his consulting-room, which served him also as a den, sorting old letters, under the red-shaded electric lamp by his desk.

Captain Demmean was announced. Pinney started up. "Hullo!"

The salutation is a hard-worked one with us, isn't it? On the present occasion it did duty as the heartiest of welcomes. "There—sit down——" Ned sat down in the patient's chair. "I'll make a brew," fussed the doctor.

"No. Don't. I want to keep my head cool."

Pinney nodded, re-seated himself in his revolving chair, and looked expectant.

"Shall we be to ourselves?" Ned inquired. "You know I love your wife, but——"

Pinney burst out laughing; he couldn't help it, though Ned's gravity was intense.

Ned smiled faintly.

"We're safe in here," said Pinney. "I love my wife, too, but if I hadn't a place which, being one woman out of ten thousand, she

never enters uninvited—I'm not sure I should."

Ned was sitting with his shoulders bent forward, knees together, feet turned in. One of those clumsy attitudes the body tumbles into when the mind is highly roused.

"I've got a clue, Pinney," he said, without looking up.

"You have?"

"And if it *is* a clue—and I myself have no doubt of that——"

"Well?"

"Everybody's going to have a surprise."

"Do you mean you'll be able to prove your brother didn't fall by his own hand?"

"I think so."

"And spot the criminal?"

"Yes."

"An outsider?"

"No."

"Do I know him?"

"Yes."

"Name."

"John Grant," said Ned; and now he looked up and his eyes met Pinney's. "John Grant of Rufus Lodge."

Pinney wasn't a successful doctor for nothing. Having reached sixty-three he was incapable of being startled. He considered his young friend attentively for a minute, formed a certain conclusion and said, while from habit his hand went to the pocket containing his fountain-pen, "Look here, Ned, you've other relations you know more of than the Bussches, haven't you—and plenty of friends? Any shooting invitations?" Ned smiled and held up four fingers. "Well," the doctor went on, encouraged by the seeming docility of the person in the patient's chair, "accept the jolliest of the four and be off. Here you, run down with your fever, come and stick yourself in the tepid bath of the Thames Valley, and give yourself up to a gloomy hopeless task and—it's a mania, my dear lad, that's what it is, and if you don't pull up I won't answer for the consequences. That eternal cigarette smoking, too. Drop it. Take to a pipe. Your nerves will thank you."

"I knew you'd drivel on like this," said Ned, sitting up and stretching himself. "Give me a week. One week. If at the end of that time I've made no advance I'll do as you say."

Go off to Scotland. Meanwhile, as I've come up here to talk, will you let me?"

He lighted a cigarette.

"Talk away," said Pinney, with rather a fierce shrug.

"The clue I have my hand on is this. Uncle Jack is a sham. Grant is madly in love with my cousin Emmy."

"Rot."

"Wait a bit."

And Ned gave an account of the abortive visit he had just paid to Fir Bank, an account so vivid, simple and earnest that Pinney was impressed. "Well," he said reluctantly, "if it's a fact that Grant cares for Emmy in that way I'm sorry for him. The girl will never return it. But good gracious!—why suppose that if it is so he would be guilty of anything so vile—and live beside her now, helping her to bear up under the blow that nearly destroyed her—conscious all the while of being the man who dealt it? It's impossible."

"I don't know. Human nature's funny."

"Look here, Ned, you'll not be offended, will you? I believe you're jealous. Set a thief

to catch a thief, eh? And jealous people see monsters."

"Well," he said boldly, "I *am* keen on Emmy. Now then!"

Pinney didn't say that his wife had already prepared him for the revelation; remarking after Ned's last visit to The Elms, "Old man, our dear Emmy may still be Mrs. Demmean." No; the doctor felt Ned's confidence to be a great compliment, he seized his hand and shook it affectionately. "Here's success to you! She'll have a ripping good husband. Concentrate on that idea. To me there's a ridiculousness even in defending Grant. He's above suspicion."

"Quite so. Consequently it never struck anyone at the inquest to ask *at what time* he left the sale at Cotterell from which he was mentioned by his servants as having *just returned* when Maurice Ransom ran round from Como to fetch him on the morning of the fifteenth of April. No one thought anything about it. I have ascertained from Hinchley that Grant only stayed a short time at the sale. I see him coming straight back, taking the cut across the lambing fields, letting himself into

his own garden, going through into the Como garden, entering by the French window upon Julian in the study. The thing might be premeditated or it might not. Anyhow, as he is a remarkably able, cool-headed fellow he would be well equal, after he had done the deed, to arranging the scene in all its details. Odd he should leave his pistol behind; but clever people do make mistakes like that. Having *finished*, my gentleman walks round to the front entrance of Rufus Lodge and, so far as his own servants can see, does return from the sale only a few minutes before Maurice Ransom arrived with his tidings. As for the elderly lady caller, either it was as you yourself suggested—she simply shrank from coming forward or she somehow *saw* and Grant bribed her. And now I know why from the first I couldn't abide him."

Pinney had listened attentively. He shook his head. "It won't do, my dear boy. This that you've been putting together in your haunted brain—it's melodrama."

"Isn't there a lot of melodrama in the daily papers, especially just now?"

"No doubt, but men like Grant aren't in-

volved. He's only got to say where he was, what he did, from the time he left Cotterell to when he got home. To bring forward his witnesses."

"You told me Leah Swanell was a remarkable woman," said Ned, unmoved. "You're right."

"You've seen her?"

Ned sketched his meeting with Leah. "She knows *something*," he ended. "And that something I expect to get at."

"She's crazy. I never said she wasn't crazy. Her evidence wouldn't be taken in a court of justice."

"I don't want her to give evidence in a court of justice. I want her to put me on the right track. I say, doctor! I'm on at Dante. In English. There are notes. Grant reminds me of the mediaeval Italian blackguards they tell of. That cool, civil outside. Even his virtues. I hear he gives a lot of money to the poor. They were like that. The poor didn't get in their way. Anyone who did—disappeared. He *is* half-Italian, isn't he?"

"As English as you are. His aunt married an Italian. Your flowery fancy again, Ned!

One thing. Grant and your brother were good friends. Julian took to him. But I had it from Miss Watkyn that Grant didn't care about the match. He made no secret of it, you see, as he would have done if all was as you imagine. It was just an affectionate relation's natural nervousness—as such Miss Watkyn spoke of it.”

“Ho, ho! Uncle Jack's a sort of relation of mine, now that I come to think,” said Ned with a total change of manner. “He's my second cousin's uncle. Only an adopted one. Still, I might ask leave to call him Uncle Jack, don't you think? Ho, ho! Affectionate and nervous. Perhaps I shall before long.”

Pinney felt no inclination to smile at Ned's humour. The young man stretched himself and yawned and stood up. “When will the Kaye detective-inspector, who didn't believe in the suicide, be home?” he asked. “Gaywood.”

“Now Ned,” fretted the doctor, “now Ned! What are you planning?”

“I only want to ask him *why* he didn't believe in it. I shan't say a word. I'm an ass

when I haven't time to think, but when I have, I'm damned cautious, doctor."

Pinney still looked perturbed.

"Gaywood's away, you said——."

"He came back from Hastings yesterday," Pinney admitted. "I saw him this morning in Kaye."

Ned looked pleased. He sat down again as if not knowing that he did so.

It put Pinney out that, owing to his young friend's obstinacy, he couldn't force him to see how hopelessly wild were his present notions. He sat musing a while, then said, "It's been a strange business. But Grant! Mind Leah Swanell doesn't make you as mad as herself. It seems to me you've started in that direction."

A strange business. Yes, Ned reflected; but how strange the doctor doesn't know. He is cheerfully unaware of the part Coral Ransom played in the drama.

There had been a moment when Ned wondered, Did Grant discover Julian's intended treachery, and in sudden fury for Emmy's sake shoot him down like a dog? No. That couldn't be. The worse Julian behaved the

better it was for Grant. What he had done was this. He had snatched the cards out of Fate's hands just as she was about to deal forth a trump that would very likely have won him the game. Laid low the lover who was no longer a lover. Robbed not Emmy Busshe but Coral Ransom.

But for his promise to Maurice, Ned must have bound Pinney over to secrecy and told him then and there.

Chapter XIV.

THE Mission Room Sale was over. It had been, as Mr. Sim told everybody, a screaming success. He was happy. So was some one else. Coral Ransom.

At nine in the evening she was sitting alone in her little drawing-room; she had turned in there on entering the house. The Queen of the Night lay on the floor beside her in a silk bag.

When Coral installed herself at the Sale her ruling idea was one which had no connection whatever with the spiritual welfare of the Daunt poor. Mr. Sim's preaching and personality had lately drawn to his church the great lady of the neighbourhood, Lady Alicia Lamely, daughter of a Duke, wife of an Earl's son. She lived in one of the old houses giving on the Kaye side of the Park.

Apart from the glory attaching to her birth, a kind which in these days perhaps has dulled over a bit, Lady Alicia was most noteworthy.

She was very clever and rather rude. Went where she pleased, people were afraid of her. She was kind to her husband who had been invalided in the war.

When Mr. Sim asked Lady Alicia to open the sale she said, "For *you* I will. But keep people off me. I haven't time to know all the good women in Daunt."

Coral had made up her mind to captivate Lady Alicia. And she did.

She presided at the Art Stall. Maurice had given her a lot of beautiful photographs. Pausing with Mr. Sim at her elbow to consider the collection Lady Alicia was struck by Coral's appearance. She didn't care who she was. Little degrees of social difference which mattered in Daunt meant nothing to her. From her altitude she saw a level.

Coral invariably rose to occasions. This time she outdid herself. Lady Alicia liked flattery. But it must be of the best. Coral could flatter like an angel—if angels do. Lady Alicia enjoyed herself. Roundabout, complexionless, frankly middle-aged, she admired beautiful young women when they were good. Of course Mrs. Ransom wouldn't be where

she was if she wasn't. Mr. Sim left the two in close conversation. He rubbed his hands. He liked Coral.

Lady Alicia was bringing up her four young daughters on old-fashioned lines. They were allowed pleasures, however. A birthday party was coming off and they had begged for tableaux. Lady Alicia didn't profess to understand tableaux. Suppose Mrs. Ransom and her husband were to come over one afternoon to Old Lodge (Lady Alicia's place) and talk it over. Coral pretended to hesitate. Her husband's work. He was crowded up. "Oh, nonsense. Bring him along. It will be quite worth his while to be mentioned in connection with *my* tableaux!" "So it will," said Coral with a musical laugh. "What a fool I am!" (Her report of the business pressure on Maurice was of course enormously exaggerated.)

To this tune things went. And now to convince herself that it wasn't a dream, Coral took out her purse-diary and read on the engagement leaf: "4.30, Nov. 1, Lady Alicia Lamely. Old Lodge. Kaye."

Yes, it was happiness, the sort of happiness that suited Coral. An end achieved. By Coral

herself. More ends—endless ends—in view, to be achieved. Also by Coral. Confidently, serenely, she reposed.

Maurice came in and kissed her and asked about supper. He seemed a little child sporting round her. She had only been waiting for him, she said. There was hot soup and cold pie. "The soup smells good," said Maurice. They went into the dining-room and Hilda brought the soup.

She would tell her little boy about the great stroke when he had done stuffing and swilling. Poor lad! He had only coffee to swill.

To Ned Demmean the Sale appeared altogether a disagreeable affair. After all, Emmy wasn't there. Another girl sold flowers in the dress of the Snow Queen. Rushing to Miss Watkyn he learned that Emmy had a headache. Miss Watkyn added further information. She herself was leaving Fir Bank for a week. An unprecedented event. But her last surviving aunt who lived at Brighton had begun to die and was anxious to see her. Ned liked this news. One of Emmy's bodyguard would be out of the way for a bit, he reflected.

“How *will* they manage without me?” sighed Miss Watkyn.

“When do you go?”

“To-morrow, early.”

He emptied his pockets among the stall-holders and went off.

Ned was in a state of marked tension. He had decided, wisely perhaps, to make no move towards Leah Swanell—to wait for her. In his restlessness he forsook this idea. Why not call and stir the old woman up? He knew her cottage by sight and on leaving the little Daunt Town Hall where the Sale was, betook himself to All Saints’ Alley.

It was four o’clock, a clear, breezy afternoon. As he approached the Regent’s Road end of the alley he saw a tall man’s figure standing motionless beside the narrow path, the back turned to it; he was facing the allotments. It was Grant. He was eyeing the piece of waste ground where the allotments ended; clay and sand trodden and beaten together into a substance almost mortar-like; rain-pools and a stunted bush or two and the blackened sites of old bonfires and heaps of refuse ready to make

new ones—a pigmy No Man's land it seemed. Grant stood there scrutinizing the spot.

Ned came up with him. "Prospecting?" he said.

Grant turned round. "As soon as building can be done I ought to pull down those cottages," he remarked, pointing with his stick to the picturesque old triple block across the allotments, "and get a modern row in there."

Before joining him Ned could have sworn the man had had no such matter in his thoughts. But he spoke so absolutely as if out of the genuine overflow of an absorbed mind; simply, meditatively.

"You're a philanthropic landlord, I suppose." Ned didn't know why he said that.

"I'm very much like other landlords, I believe," said Grant indifferently, and then went on his way with a nod which, if not exactly condescending, did tend in that direction.

He was ever a rapid walker, and Ned lingered a moment, not sure whether to turn into the Swanell back-garden—or ought he to go into the Regent's Road and knock at the front-entrance? Ned, before he decided on the back-way, saw Grant cross to Fir Bank, run

up the steps to the really curious old door with its lantern-porch and let himself in with his latch-key.

The sight did not improve Ned's humour.

He rapped with his stick at the Swanell back-door.

Two minutes passed. He was about to try again when the door was opened by Rose, neat and composed-looking, with her quick glance; she had a needle and blue thread run into the bosom of her dark gown.

Either Ned had forgotten all about this girl or he vaguely thought of her as out at work all day. He had felt sure that if anyone opened the door it would be Leah. Somewhat taken aback he none the less addressed Rose most politely.

"Is your mother in, Miss Swanell?"

"No," said Rose.

Rose's face was a mask. Yet Ned had an idea that she was annoyed. Has she told the truth, he wondered——

As the thought came into his mind he perceived that she had. Turning his head he saw Leah herself coming up the alley with swinging steps, striking the path now and then with

her stick, but it was evidently not a needful prop.

To Ned she seemed changed. There was something over-animated yet more wandering in her glance; a flare and a flutter about her person; parts of her dress flew on the breeze; the red rose in her black hat had got loose and hung over the brim. If she had looked like this when he met her in the Park, Ned would not have been impressed as he actually was.

“Running after me, Captain Demmean?” she exclaimed as she pushed at the rickety little gate. “What’ll my daughter say? At my time of life!”

It was Ned’s turn to be annoyed now. He changed colour as Rose fixed on him a look in which there was dignity with a shade of reproach. It seemed to say, Can’t you leave my poor afflicted mother alone?

Leah made no offer to enter her house nor did she ask Captain Demmean in. She stood looking from her daughter to the visitor, maliciously enjoying the embarrassment she was to them both. Her mischief had something childlike about it.

Ned got rid of the queer feeling of guilt

which Rose's clear sharp glance had given him and said, turning round to Leah though his words were meant just as much for the daughter—"You remember, Mrs. Swanell, when we met by chance in the Park, you spoke to me about my brother in a way which interested me very much. You promised to come up to Como one day—and—renew our chat."

Leah's silly lightness fell from her. "Chance!" she said gloomily, "there's no such thing as chance."

"Perhaps not," he said. "When will you come?"

"To-morrow."

Unexpected—almost startling—but satisfactory.

"What time?"

"Seven, if Rose doesn't lock me up."

"My mother is joking," put in Rose.

"Ay, it *is* a joke," said Leah with one of her odd disconcerting smiles, "that I should have such a starched-up piece of goods for a daughter. Who wants daughters, either? Pang on pang!—and then only to be told when all's done that there's another woman in the world. And if Those Above give you a son, the finest,

loveliest boy that ever was born, the law people take him from you and kill him though it wasn't his sentence. I wish I'd lived single. That's a lie. Let me pass, Rose!"

Rose fell back and without further notice of Ned the old woman passed into the cottage.

Ned touched his cap awkwardly to Rose, she seemed about to say something but changed her mind. He walked away.

Rose was working hard for Miss Watkyn. Benny's wardrobe was in rather a bad way, nor could she buy new things; black was imminent and to arrive in new black on a visit to the dying wouldn't do. So Rose had to repair and renovate. After sunset, when the allotments in the brief dusk gave out a strong smell of decay, she ran over to Fir Bank with her parcels.

The housemaid told her Miss Watkyn had said, would she go straight up to her room when she came. Miss Watkyn was packing. Rose mounted from the basement to the dining-room floor; then up the narrow old-fashioned staircase leading to the drawing-room. The gas had not been lighted; it was dark here; she heard some one coming out of the drawing-

room; knew it was Grant and in the corner where the staircase turned they met. He stopped her and his voice said in her ear, in the dark, "The possibility you suggested as to the piece of waste ground by the allotments is *not* a possibility. It would have taken far too long." Raising his voice—"Has Hoppner been round, Rose, about the cistern?"

"Not yet, sir."

"I must speak again. Good night."

Thrilled, half-chilly, half-warm, Rose ran up to the bedroom storey.

Grant turned off from the hall into Busshe's study. Francis, standing about among his books, seemed to be rather haunting the room than living in it.

"Jack!" he brought out on a note of relief; "I've something on my mind."

Grant sat down.

"When Benny showed us Eaglet in a fancy dress last night—— She looked so like her mother." With his delicate elongated Vandyke hands Busshe was distressfully folding, unfolding, re-folding a publishers' circular. "Did you notice it?"

"She does now look like her mother sometimes," Grant agreed.

"Yes; but like her when—— Jack, she's terribly thin."

"Less thin than she was."

"And that hectic colour. Is she seeing Pinney?"

"Not professionally. They stopped long ago. He says she's mending."

"And he's quite good, isn't he?"

"Plenty of sense. Knows Emmy, too."

"Ah!" Busshe dropped the bit of paper and ran his hands through his hair. "You see," he said, "I have two lives. My own and Eaglet's. *Hers is mine* too. If anything happened to her I should die. It wouldn't matter particularly"—he glanced wistfully towards his desk—"no, it wouldn't matter so far as I'm concerned," he said in a more decided tone than he had yet used. "But she's so young. Eighteen."

"Nonsense. Take my word for it, Frank, the child is going to be all right."

With a beautiful smile Busshe contemplated his oracle. His precious, precious oracle. The

man who in the mad ever-grinding world outside Busshe's world was head and hand to him.

Let it not be supposed that he ever felt grateful to John Grant. He would as soon have thought of feeling grateful to his own soul.

"Rose! Rose!"

It was Emmy's voice called out of the drawing-room as Rose came down from Miss Watkyn. She went in. The room was almost dark. Emmy was sitting in one of the windows. At her elbow was a bamboo occasional table with a Dante bound in richly ornamented white vellum on it. That couldn't now be seen. Rose went to light the gas. "Don't," said Emmy, "I like firelight."

"But there isn't any," said Rose. She poked at the dull coals. A feeble flame sprang out. "What have you been doing?" she enquired.

"Reading Dante with Uncle Jack." Emmy got up and came and took Rose by her two hands. "I want you to go with me to see the grave tomorrow," she said in a low voice.

Rose's hands stiffened in the grasp of Emmy's hands. "I can't do that," she said.

"Why not?"

"You promised Mr. Grant you'd not visit Mr. Demmean's grave."

"One can't always keep one's promises."

"One should, Miss Emmy."

"Talk! I must go."

"Then it won't be with me. Mr. Grant was afraid you might make a practice of going there; he said it was the worst thing you could do, and you promised——"

Emmy interrupted her. "What a lot you think of him! He's only a man like other men."

Rose's sallow face was red in the dusky flicker. "It doesn't matter what I think of Mr. Grant," she said hotly. She pulled her hands away from Emmy's. "You will please yourself, Miss. If I didn't think a lot of Mr. Grant," she went on, after a moment's pause, "I should be ungrateful indeed. He has been our Providence. And I'm not ashamed of it."

Emmy sat down with such a weary movement it went to Rose's heart. Instead of taking her leave, as she had meant to do, she sat down too. They were both silent a while, then Emmy said, "Rose, have you ever tried to picture Eternity?"

"I don't know that I have," said Rose, relieved at the change of subject.

"I have," said Emmy. "I thought of a time and a time and a time—on, on, on—still it wasn't Eternity. Then, lately, it struck me—a feeling which can't die—*that* makes an eternity of its own and there are such feelings. But now I wonder almost—— Are there?"

Rose was unable to follow the train of ideas in this broken confidence. The fire's one flame blew out and showed Emmy's face sharply, strangely fixed. Rose went and kneeled beside her, but as she would have spoken Busshe's foot was heard on the stairs and Emmy jumped up. "Light the gas," she called out. She ran to the open piano and standing dashed into one of her father's favourite tunes. He must have a tune, Francis Busshe must, something he can hum. He did hum now the air Emmy was playing; he has an ear, he came up to the piano. "How does Eaglet feel this evening?" he enquired.

"Grand—grand—grand," she sang to her music. She made a kissing face at him.

"Ah, Jack Grant is always right," he said, rubbing his exquisitely formed hands.

Chapter XV

AS Rose shook out her little breakfast-cloth at the back-door the morning after Captain Demmean's call the wind drove rain against her. Yet, seeing a man turn into solitary All Saints' Alley, she lingered a moment. He had a shambling gait, was carefully shielding himself with an umbrella and carried a basket.

Why, it was Hinchley. The instant Rose recognized him she had an inspiration. A scene was born in her mind, complete; she saw her own part in it as if written. By way of a preliminary she whisked into the parlour where a smart frock she was making lay on the sofa, snatched up one of several pink riband bows which were to go on the dress and pinned it in her hair.

Pink made a wonderful difference in Rose and she knew it, yet eschewed the colour, thinking it showy if not quite vulgar.

When she returned to the back-door Hinch-

ley had got nearly to the side-gate. She was going to call him in for the first time in her life. Then saw that it was unnecessary. Her cottage was his goal.

Her smile and the great pink butterfly bow in the straight dark hair surprised him. "Good-morning," he said, showing his two big upper teeth in a return smile as he put down his umbrella. "Mr. Grant's sent you and Mrs. Swanell a basket of vegetables. I met the gardener coming out of Rufus Lodge. He was doing a bit of a swear, he's so busy with his greenhouses and he'd just sent his boy out; he said, 'Mr. Grant don't often give an order—if he does he expects it attended to at once, so I'm bound to toddle, damn it'; *I* said, I'm going that way, I'll leave the basket and welcome, and here I am."

Rose said it was nice of him. Standing in the kitchen which she kept like a picture, waiting for her to empty the basket, he said, "Ah, we'd turn this nice kitchen into a parlour and build on to the scullery for a kitchen if we'd our shop."

"You're all talk. What about doing?" said Rose.

“Doing? Ain’t I game to go this very evening if you say so, to the Reverend Sim and ask him to put the banns up?”

“I daresay you are. You want a shop and a wife, that’s all for self. But suppose I ask you to do a little thing for *me*—no connection with your own interests—then would you do it?”

She shook her head, looking ten times prettier than usual.

“Try,” said Hinchley.

“Very well, I will. Mother’s going up to Como at seven this evening. She’s been talking to Captain Demmean about his brother and it seems he likes to hear her. You know Alfred’s been at me more than once to send her away.”

Hinchley nodded.

“They’re well looked after in these asylums,” he said.

“But I promised father as long as I *could* live with her I would. The thing’s this. She’s got some flightier notion in her head than usual about poor Mr. Demmean and I’m afraid if the Captain encourages her she’ll

commit herself in some way—give Alfred a chance to step in, do you see?”

“But what can *I* do?” Hinchley awkwardly took a half seat on the table. Rose leaned against it beside him.

“I’d give much to know something of what passes between them this evening,” she said thoughtfully. “You could help me to that.”

“How though?”

“It’ll be dark. Does Captain Demmean have the study shutters up?”

“Never, while he’s there. He likes the French window open. He’s a fresh air gentleman.”

“Then if you happen to be in the garden and went rather near the French window you’d catch what’s said.”

“What? Listen?”

“Well! Only in a way that might occur by chance.”

“It’s considered mean.”

“But you’d have a good purpose.”

Hinchley pondered. He had no clear conviction on any subject, he lived by sensation and habit.

“Captain Demmean would kick me off the premises if he found it out,” he said slowly.

Rose leaned closer to him. “How could he find it out? You’ll be in the dark and they in the light.”

“Well, but Rose! If I take the risk will it mean us getting married?”

“I told you so,” she exclaimed, as if in high scorn. “You won’t do it for *me*—not”—she paused a moment—“not, as a gentleman would; chivalrously.”

Rose hadn’t lived ten years with the Contessa for nothing.

Hinchley was stung.

“I will!” he declared. “But you said you’d give *much* to know what passes. Now if tonight I’ve anything worth while to tell you, will you give me—not much”—“Oh Hinchley!” — “but something that’ll cost you nothing?”

“What?”

Hinchley blushed. “A kiss,” he said.

Ugly as Hinchley was, Rose, so long as she gained her end, didn’t care two straws whether she kissed him or not. Of course she was careful not to show this. She coquetted till

Hinchley was nearly off his head, then suddenly she gave way. The compact was made.

At noon Leah came down to the kitchen. She had in her hand the black hat with the sorry red rose in it.

“Make this look ladylike,” she said. “Don’t take the rose out.”

Rose was slaving at the frock with the pink bows. She found some black net, however, and quickly retrimmed the hat.

Then went back to her own work.

Stich, stitch, stitch.

There was a clear red sunset promising a fine day for to-morrow.

At twenty minutes to seven Leah reappeared. Her white hair was magnificently braided. She had her most distinguished look.

Condescendingly she signified her approval of the hat. Suddenly Rose said desperately, “Mother, I’ve never told you. I’ve put by a good bit. See, mother!—you shall have it every shilling, to spend as you like, if you’ll tell me what you’ve done with—with——”

“The tight bundle,” said Leah, with a deliberately naughty smile.

Rose shivered. “Yes,” she said, mastering

herself, "tell me, instead of going letting yourself down to a stranger and the money is yours—your own."

Leah stood holding the hat, looking at it. She put it on.

"I want no money," she said quietly, "I'm called." She turned round to the window and through the dark looked steadily northwards. "I can see winter coming," she said, "but I'll not see him come."

"Don't say that, mother," said Rose, hastily, mechanically.

"Why not? I'm called. I hear it in the wind and in the silence when the wind drops. In the singing of the redbreast and the ringing of the church-bells. Leah! Leah! Come away."

"You're poorly. Don't go out to-night," urged Rose.

"I'm not poorly. I'm well and strong. Strong enough to down a magistrate. Ha, ha, ha." She crossed to the looking glass on the wall and surveyed herself in the hat. "I was a beauty once," she said. "Dark but rare. I didn't pass it on to my daughters, but I'd a youngest son and it seems I favoured him

before he saw the light, for he was my image; and if he did lend the burglars a hand it was only for a lark—the wild spirit that was in my Jimmy—and they killed him in the prison. You’ve put black over the rose. Never mind. It shows through. An artist who wanted to paint me before I got married used to call me Queen of Sheba. Well, I’m off to see Solomon. He’ll be a Solomon before I leave, he’ll know what no one else knows.” She turned round with her craziest glance, “Ta-ta, Rose. Send your love to anybody? No, no, you’ve a cold heart, girl, a cold heart. Ta-ta.”

She was gone and Rose, heavy with stifled trouble, went back to the smart frock; it was nearly done.

At a quarter to eight came Hinchley’s knock at the back door. She ran.

No pink in her hair, the riband bow was on the dress now, but she had changed for the afternoon and looked extremely nice. As for Hinchley, his best suit, a new spotted tie, shiny boots and hair showed how important he felt the occasion to be.

“Has Mrs. Swanell come home?” These were his first words.

“Not yet. The parlour’s all over my work—come in the kitchen.”

She rolled the old family armchair to the fire-corner. Hinchley seated himself.

“I wonder she’s not in,” he said. “She was barely twenty minutes with Captain Demmean.”

“She’s roving. The dark’s nothing to her. Well?”

“Aren’t you going to sit down, Rose?”

She snatched at a chair. “Did you get anything?”

“I hope you won’t think I didn’t do my best,” said Hinchley rather dejectedly. “I could make out nothing till near the end. Except that he gave her a picture. One of the photos poor Mr. Demmean took in the Park. She made a fuss with it when she saw it hanging on the wall and he gave it to her.”

“Is that all?”

“No. But they spoke low and your mother kept moving about from place to place in the room, so most of the time I might as well have been where I am now. Then all of a sudden Mrs. Swanell brought up so near the window I didn’t feel very pleasant and she raised

her voice and said, 'I'll tell you what it is, Captain. I came here with words on my tongue but my tongue won't speak 'em. No, it won't. Here's what'll do. Meet me to-morrow—no to-morrow's Friday—meet me on Saturday—(she dropped her voice and I lost a bit) and I'll put in your hands what'll speak louder than all the tongues in Europe.' There! That's all I heard. Excuse me, Rose, but I'd no idea the old lady was as mad as she is and why Captain Demmean cares to bother with her rubbish is past my understanding."

Rose had thought from the beginning that Hinchley's dullness was under present circumstances a blessing.

"Oh, he was very fond of his brother," she said quickly, "and mother's like a child; lets out things she's noticed which most people would keep to themselves; no doubt that interests him. *Where* did she pretend she was going to meet him? And what time of day?"

"All that I missed. Saturday. Can't say more."

Rose's head sank. With a jerk she raised it.

"It's of no importance," she said. "Thank you."

Hinchley sat staring at her. The charmer of the morning was gone. An absent-looking smileless young woman met his view. He felt dreadfully bashful. He stood up as if his legs were not quite under his control. "I was to have a reward, Rose," he said in a thick voice.

"Oh yes, Hinchley," she said in a business-like tone. "A kiss, wasn't it? But you surely don't expect me to come after you with it."

Thus encouraged, Hinchley tried to take the initiative. He never could remember afterwards exactly what happened. It was all so different from his fancies and plans. He couldn't say Rose hadn't kept her word. But he felt swindled, out and out. Poor Hinchley.

Leah came in at nine and went straight up to bed.

Chapter XVI

OCTOBER'S last glory day. It is near noon. Down against the earth, the sun—king, father, lover, playmate and friend—leans close, close; all about lie lakes of light; the green earth seems in a trance to John Grant, who has walked round to Fir Bank, stands a moment at the gate; is he too entranced?—still enough for that; but no; his brain is busy.

His back is turned to Fir Bank. He looks across the road at the long, narrow alley beside the allotments with the autumn dew not wholly dried from off their laughing green and scarlet and orange tatters; he cannot from here see the Swanell cottage except with his inward eye; it stands away to the left in its peaceful little garden dominated by the massive back of All Saints' Church.

Grant's Daunt neighbours are not altogether wrong about him. He has qualities which in a high public position would have served him

well. Boldness, firmness, acuteness. And what can they do for him at this crisis of his life as a man? Nothing.

He believes a weak-witted semi-gipsy, his servant's widow, the creature of his bounty, couchant in the cottage yonder, to have at her disposal a deadly weapon she can use as the enemy a craze has turned her into; and just because of her weakness his strength is no good. She cannot be dealt with on rational lines. So he must fold his hands, tame as an infant.

The feeling of his helplessness becomes intolerable as he stares up the alley. Then it passes and is replaced by a confidence causeless but most welcome. After all, he reflected, the menace, the danger arising from Leah's irresponsible vagaries may end in smoke. As the smile formed itself in his mind white smoke twisted up into the sun-flood from a bonfire in the allotments. He smiled.

Frank Busshe only took up a few minutes, he was in full writing swing. Grant went to the drawing-room. He could hear the piano.

Emmy was feeling her way through a hard bit of Schumann. She broke off and he pulled

a low seat near the music-chair. "Any news?" he said cheerfully.

She looked paler than ever; perhaps her father's fears, while he soothed them, had found a lodgment in Grant's breast; he was suddenly alarmed for her; hence his specially bright tone.

"Mr. Sim has been in."

"What for?"

"To enquire after my headache, and he asked for Benny. I told him headache and aunt were both gone. Then he said, could he come one evening and talk philosophy with dad."

"Good Lord!"

"He says a pinch of philosophy would do well in his sermons. Really, he wants to convert dad. He *is* coming. To-morrow evening. Before chess. Chess may be late.—I'm tired this morning." Her head dropped back, "Will you be sure and come to-morrow evening?"

"Sure, Eaglet."

"Don't call me that," she cried out.

"Not?"

"No."

"Why not?"

A perceptible tremor ran through her. "Oh, I was once a child," she said passionately. "Long long, ago. It's a silly thing to say, but I was so happy then. Do you remember the green grapes you used to give me off the vine-arbour when I came to Rufus Lodge? The green grapes. Don't call me Eaglet."

She burst into an agony of tears. According to what her aunt said, and I believe Benny was right, the girl since the day on which she had lost her lover had never been able to weep. Grant let her be for a while; he saw that Nature was doing a salutary work; but when a few minutes had passed he took her right hand away from her face and enclosed it in his own hand. Soon the paroxysm stilled itself, the icy cold, thin little hand grew warmer. She changed from sobs to choking sighs and turned round to him.

"A storm!" she gasped, trying to smile.

"The sun!" said Grant. He nodded towards the window.

"Leaving!"

"Shall we go too?"

"How?"

"Would you like a tour to Italy?"

"Dad."

"It'd wake him up."

"The expense."

"Leave sordid details to me."

She closed her eyes. The hall door bell rang. "One of my gratis music pupils!" she exclaimed.

"You must wash your face," said Grant. "Have you eau de Cologne?"

The little hand still lay in his as if too weary to move. He raised it and pressed it to his lips. He had left off kissing her when she was thirteen or fourteen; at that time she said, "I'm glad Granty doesn't kiss me now. Somehow it's more like him not to kiss."

"Eau de Cologne," he repeated; there was a strange inappropriate sternness in his voice. "Have you plenty?"

"An old friend gave me a whole case at Christmas," she replied. "Doesn't he remember?"

They leave the drawing-room together; he watches her dart up to the bedroom story.

In the hall he passes a fat, pasty-faced, rather dirty girl of fifteen in a staring green jersey, with a music-book under her arm. The

young person gets a surprisingly short lesson this morning.

That which weighed Emmy down was lightened for a time at any rate. Looking at the sun and the earth she felt her blood stir. She wanted to be out.

Ned Demmean, as he motored from his own gates, saw her walking slowly on the other side of the way. He was bound for town; his solicitors; he meant to go round by Kaye and interview the detective-inspector, Gaywood. When the form of Emmy caught his eye he backed; jumped out.

She seemed different. More life and movement about her. "You weren't at the Sale," he hastily informed her.

"No. Were you?"

"Oh yes. I bought Miss Watkyn's orange jumper."

"You haven't got it on."

That appeared like wit to Ned as she ran her eyes over his person; but it was something better; girlish nonsense; a peep out of the old young Emmy.

"I gave it to Mrs. Pinney for a hospital patient," he said. He struck himself as being dull

and stupid out of the ordinary; that couldn't be helped.

He suggested a motor run some day—soon; he felt glad that disliking Julian's car he had sold it and bought another.

"Do come," he said. His face for the first time in speech with Emmy broke its bonds; it could be very expressive and at this moment it was.

"Next week," she said. He saw the beginning of a smile; it was not one of her accustomed show smiles, either; only the beginning; a nod, a wave—she was gone.

A little later Coral Ransom stood at her gate watching up the road the lessening shape of a car a good deal less smart and swift than Captain Demmean's. It was Lady Alicia Lamely's. She had looked in to tell Coral to come to Old Lodge an hour earlier than the time mentioned at the Sale. And twice did she call Maurice Ransom's wife "dear."

"One of your conquests," said a loud voice at Coral's elbow.

Mr. Sim's eyes, too, were on Lady Alicia's car as it disappeared.

"One of yours," said Coral gracefully.

“Lady Alicia has been saying how she loved your sermon last Sunday.”

Mr. Sim had addressed his congregation on the subject of easy divorce. He was a born orator and very angry and people enjoyed themselves.

“A baby could have preached that sermon,” he said. “It’s all so grossly obvious. There’s much to be said for free love”—he raised his voice, which was unnecessary, he always did it when he hoped to shock you—“but wobbly marriage”—he stuck out his ugly mouth—“piff!”

“There goes Mr. Grant,” remarked Coral; he was walking in the road; staring ahead; he glanced round; Coral’s bow was ideal; off darted the hat; Sim severely touched a finger to his Papistical wide-awake.

“A man I don’t like,” he said.

Coral admired Grant. She wasn’t naïve enough to tell Sim so. “Everybody can’t be like you,” she said.

“I don’t want him to be like me. I want him to give an organ recital at All Saints’ for the Mission Room—and he won’t. Infernal selfishness.”

“I wish *I* could play the organ.”

She gave him one of those discreet but very pleasant looks which she occasionally allowed herself in a *tête-à-tête* with a man. Her good spirits quite got the better of her. Everything was so nice this morning. Sim smiled at the beauty benignly. An ascetic's refined appreciation of the look she had bestowed on him came out in his farewell pressure of her hand.

So much for the little red villa at Dangerous Corner. But Rose Swanell was all alone in her cottage at the head of All Saints' Alley. Leah had refused breakfast and gone out early; silent; excited. The pink-ribboned frock was done and sent home. Rose tried to start her next task. She couldn't. She came out into the garden-plot with the fruit-trees in their thinning rich-hued leaves above the green grass. Hither and thither she paced. Should she warn Grant of what Hinchley had told her? Had her mother really the power and intention of taking to-morrow a decisive step? Meeting Edward Demmean. Producing—— Oh yes, she must go to Grant. He would be sitting on the Bench at Kaye this afternoon. In the evening she must go.

Hinchley, betraying inexperience over the agreed-on kiss, came back to her; the vision of his two prominent teeth, pink skin and clumsily jointed figure brought back a day of giddy girlhood, when she'd confided to little Emmy Busshe that she thought Hinchley resembled both a rabbit and a crab. And once, when the Contessa had tea in the garden, and Rose was spreading her marmalade sandwich, and Hinchley appeared with the brass tea-kettle, Emmy called out to him: "Hinchley, which do you like best, rabbits or crabs!" She'd laughed, she couldn't help it; Emmy at six was so droll and Emmy shrieked her gladdest shriek and the tall fine looking but sad-looking young man beside his aunt, smiled though he wasn't in the know; he always had a smile for the naughty Eaglet's fun. How well the smile suited his keen, grave face!

Why think of all this?

The great red back of All Saints' church oppressed her. But its front looked on the river—the river, running to the sea. She felt rested when she thought how near the river was.

Che sara sara. Strange that Grant should have quoted the Contessa's favourite proverb.

For he knew, if any man did, how to put up a fight against Fate. *Che sara sara*. A pretty sound the words had.

She was getting her shoes wet on the grass. She stepped off it. As she did so she saw Hinchley coming up the alley at top speed. His thin legs flew out as if they hardly belonged to him.

Hinchley had meant to be cold to Rose for a few weeks. But something had happened which prevented him from carrying out his dignified intention.

"Rose," he said, out of breath, "I've come to break it to you—your mother's had a bad accident. A motor-van. I was down that way, buying fish—it was near the *Bunch of Grapes* it happened. They said she'd only had four-pennorth, but they noticed as she went off she walked giddy."

"She was fasting," said Rose, rigid.

"Dr. Pinney was driving by and took her up in his car. He'll have her at the front door by now."

Pinney and Leah were old friends. He had attended her in her four confinements. She liked him well.

She might live some hours, he said. He wouldn't wonder if she was to recover consciousness before the end. He'd look in again in the course of the afternoon.

Alfred Swanell was laid up with a rheumatic knee. Rose was thankful. Lottie came down and stared curiously at the senseless figure on the bed and chattered awhile and then got bored and left, saying Rose could send for her later if she wished.

A neighbour, an elderly woman, less uncongenial than Lottie, came in.

Rose watched and watched, wetting the lips now and then with brandy. At four Pinney returned. As his step came up the stair Leah's eyes opened. "There's the doctor," she said quietly.

Pinney sat down by the bed. Rose stood at the foot.

"Doctor," said Leah, "I want to see Captain Demmean."

"You can't, mother," said Rose.

"Why not indulge her?" said Pinney. Evidently Rose's physical ministrations to her mother were of the first order, but he felt her mental attitude to be hard. "Captain Dem-

mean is very good-natured. It's only a few steps. Or you might tell my man—send my car."

Rose felt herself change colour. She folded her arms and said in a low voice, "You'll act as you please, doctor, I shall have nothing to do with sending for him. Captain Demmean's notice over-excites my mother."

"Send for him, doctor," pleaded Leah.

She avoided looking at Rose.

Pinney ran down. In the kitchen he found Hinchley, who had come to inquire. Hinchley was standing by the fire, going over in his mind the kiss scene, trying to imagine exactly what he ought to do if a like opportunity were to arise in the future. Hailed by Pinney as a messenger he informed the doctor that Captain Demmean was in town, wouldn't be back before dinner.

"She'll be gone by then," said Pinney.

He went back and told Leah. Rose lowered her stern fixed eyes. All at once Leah seemed quite indifferent on the subject.

"Is there anything else we can do for you?" said Pinney.

“Give me that photo off the wall,” said Leah.
“Oak Dip. Pretty place. Pretty place.”

This was the picture Hinchley had spoken of, Julian Demmean’s photograph of Leah’s favourite spot in the Park. She had fallen into raptures over it in the drawing-room at Como and Ned, having found among Julian’s things a whole collection of his own photos, gave this one to the old woman.

She was unable to take hold of the picture. It had a plain gilt frame and grey mount. Pinney held it for her. “Pretty place,” she repeated. She was seized with a cough. Not a chest cough, it came from lower down. Pinney, kindest of men, put a hand to her back. Then she whispered—and in an astonishingly clever way blended coughing and whispering together so that her whisper was drowned to Rose—“There; tell Captain it’s there.”

With an effort she laid a thumb on the haggard figure in the foreground of the blasted oak. She shot a speaking glance into Pinney’s eyes; he looked his comprehension; she sank back satisfied.

“I’m dying,” she remarked, in a minute or two.

“Not frightened, Leah——” said Pinney.

“No, no.” She smiled, staring up. “They’ve put the light in the window.”

After the death Rose was in a fever. No one else might touch the body. She laid out all that was left to sight of her mother in the fine linen reserved for the purpose; with the last dahlias from the garden at head and feet. The weirdness of Leah’s thinness was gone. On the skin hard and dry as a dead leaf which cracks at a touch, a change had passed. Leah lay there calm, in beauty supreme.

She gave you not of her beauty, Rose. She did give you of her cleverness. But she has outwitted you at the last. Little dreaming that it was so, Rose as soon as she thought Grant would have returned from his magisterial duty at Kaye hurried to Rufus Lodge. She had a flat interview with her relations. Then it seemed natural that she should on this occasion ask to see the patron of the Swannell family.

And while she was giving Grant the news which set him temporarily at rest; telling him how her mother had passed; quite peaceful, asked at first for Captain Demmean but soon

forgot all about it; said not a word better unsaid—while Rose told this story Ned Demmean, getting back to Como, found Pinney smoking his pipe over the study fire.

Ned looked agueish and cross. Right glad however to see the friendly face. "I was disappointed in Gaywood," he said, throwing himself into the first chair handy. "Sensible, honest fellow, but limited. He argues solely from the magnolia. Satisfied himself that the magnolia had been used as a ladder. In which case there was obviously some one who used it. I expected a summing up of the whole affair from an original point of view. And others who ought to know were just as sure that the magnolia had only got battered in the storm."

"I have a message for you from Leah Swannell," said Pinney.

"The old devil! How she turns and doubles like an old fox! I've a good mind to——"

Pinney held up a finger.

"She's dead."

When Ned had heard the doctor's account of Leah's end he decided that he would visit Oak Dip before the world was abroad early in

the coming morning. "Though she may have been making a fool of me even on her death-bed," he said moodily.

"I don't think she was."

"In case there's anything I'd better have a witness. I'll get Ransom to go with me."

Pinney nodded approval. "I've a full day to-morrow," he said. "Up to dinner-time. Come and dine."

"Due at Fir Bank." Ned had rather a sheepish look.

"Fir Bank's an early house. Finish your evening with me. Bring your news."

Ned said he would.

After dinner he lighted a candle and went up to Julian's bachelor bedchamber at the top of the winding staircase above the study. He noticed how noiselessly the masked door in the wall opened and shut. He himself slept in one of the spare rooms, it was the one particular in which his existence at Como didn't match with his brother's.

The room was like an old maid's. Julian had altered nothing. He looked on himself as camping there. Used to joke with Maurice Ransom about his surroundings.

The old-fashioned bed, the tall wardrobe with glass in the door, the fussy carpet; even the papering and painting were eloquent of women—elderly woman. There were three pictures each of which helped towards the general effect. The large brass nail over the bed-head on which Julian had kept his key of the garden wall door into the lambing-fields and the field gate into the road was still there. The only visible trace of his sojourn in the room.

Ned walked to the window. It was a dark night, but he knew just how the great magnolia, now nearing its skeleton phase, looked, as it crept up and around; he opened the window and looked out.

What a silence! A cold, thick smell. The weather was changing.

Chapter XVII

AT a quarter to seven on this autumn morning, which has drizzled and will drizzle again, Oak Dip has no magic. The trees are like lifeless copies of themselves. A grey sky seems almost to sweep the green of the sodden grass. A quarter of a mile away, over the little land-lift, Ned Demmean's car and lad are waiting in one of the main roads through the Park.

The two young men who, not without difficulty, have got up from the rotten cavernous heart of the old oak Leah Swanell's deposit, stand looking blankly at it and at each other.

When first seen the mysterious object presented itself as a tight long-shaped roll done up with thick string in an old mackintosh. The string having been cut the contents were found to be——

A woman's shabby brown dress of some silky material. No pocket to it.

A black satin mantle in better condition.

A pair of grey suede gloves not much worn.

A squashed green straw hat with black cock's plume.

A red plush bag with a purse in it containing a pound note and a shilling.

A wadded petticoat.

The backbone, so to speak, of the parcel was a handsome, brand-new man's umbrella.

The costume of the elderly lady who called at Como on the morning of the fifteenth of April had been too faithfully described by Peggy Grove and Benedicta Watkyn for any doubt to be possible. The searchers had here her outer garments. Wrapped round Julian Demmean's missing umbrella.

Ned was labouring under a feeling of weariness and repulsion. He seemed unable to cope with this new factor in the problem. For one thing he had left his bed with a splitting headache.

Maurice looked pale. Getting up early was obnoxious to him. But that was not all. The discovery of these things did undoubtedly suggest, though in the vaguest fashion, that Julian

Demmean had met with foul play. And Maurice hated this idea as much as Ned hated the idea of suicide.

Besides, if this find necessitated a fresh public inquiry might not Coral's name somehow have to come out?

He fought off the idea that the bundle meant much. "That old witch, Mrs. Swanell, was mischief personified," he said. "It's my belief this is simply one of her mad pranks. The last."

Ned silently viewed the puzzling yet sickeningly commonplace head all sordid and soiled on the fresh green grass. He thought of Rose Swanell, the clever, superior young woman with her guarded manner and hostile glance. Why or in what connection he scarcely knew; but so it was.

Grant. Grant. The notion of Grant's guilt had gone on growing in his mind without any obvious aid from outside evidence. His name never passed Leah's lips. Ned had listened for it in vain. There had been an allusion to a magistrate who ought not to be on the bench but in the prisoners' dock. But that might be

only part and parcel of the wonted gabble of her delusion.

Grant. Grant. A dream came back to Ned he had had in the night and forgotten. He had dreamed he was hurrying through a long passage which as fast as he approached what seemed to be the end of it shot forward anew, interminably leading him on; till at last his labouring feet were stopped before a tall house-front with a large door. He knocked at the door, which was opened by some one who immediately sprang behind it. The house vanished. A gigantic wolf confronted the dreamer; he felt a stick in his hand and raised it; the wolf leaped; the teeth were in Ned's neck and then he knew it was Grant; furious, he tried to call out the man's name; woke, breathless.

The dream was a natural offshoot of his suspicions. Suspicions? No. He was privately certain. And sick to death of poking and groping he now came to a sudden resolution. He would go to Grant; try a face attack.

His bitter disgust with the yield of the blasted oak tree increased. He turned to Maurice. "Will you do me a favour? Motor on to

Kaye with the bundle and leave it at Gaywood's private house. It won't take you twenty minutes. Don't go to the police station. I'll write a few words."

It struck Maurice that perhaps Inspector Gaywood would wish to see him. Then he could give *his* view of the matter. A gain. He eagerly undertook Captain Demmean's commission.

Ned went home; a cup of strong tea with rum in it relieved his head; at ten o'clock he was at Rufus Lodge. Alfred Swanell was still laid up. His wife said Mr. Grant had gone out on business. They expected him back about five.

The day had to be got through. Ned motored up to town; paid his tailor a visit; called on a charming family in the Regent's Park district, old friends who were so glad to see him that he felt ashamed; came back through warmth and still a little rain.

Hinchley brought him a letter. Mr. Gaywood had called, he said; was disappointed not to find him; he left this letter, Hinchley was to be sure and deliver it as soon as Captain Demmean returned.

DEAR CAPTAIN DEMMEAN,

May I beg that you will keep the fact of your discovery close for a bit? I am not mentioning it to anyone. I have my reasons. Three possibilities seem to come under consideration.

1. A merely spiteful trick on the part of the old gipsy. Not affecting the main features of the case.

2. A double crime.

3. A gipsy pal of Leah Swanell's may have got her to assist in an attempted robbery at Como. I must say I think this is likely to be the solution. I argue from the *magnolia*; the state of which, if you accept Nos. 1 or 2, remains *in my opinion* unaccounted for. I will call early on Monday morning and shall hope to find you in.

Faithfully yours,

T. GAYWOOD.

Ned ran inattentively through this letter. All day the feeling had been strong on him that the final scene in the smothered drama of his search for the truth was waiting for him

in John Grant's house; his mind refused to work in any other direction.

Between five and six he went round again to Rufus Lodge. He knew quite well what he meant to say. Yes, Mr. Grant was in. After a moment's hesitation, Lottie Swanell, remembering the easy terms her master had been on with "poor" Mr. Demmean, took Captain Demmean to the dining-room where Grant was, and simply announced him.

There were three sorts of light in the room. The red fire. The yellow lamp. The white remaining daylight; and in that Grant was standing, at the open window.

He turned round; advanced with his hand out. Ned avoided the hand. "I'm bound to tell you, Mr. Grant," he said, "I don't come as a friend."

Grant said nothing. They were now opposite to each other with the dining-table, a round one when, as now, the leaf wasn't in, between them. Ned was flushed and precipitate; but for a wonder he succeeded in sticking to his programme pretty well.

"A discovery has been made," he said, "in consequence of a message sent to me through

Dr. Pinney by old Mrs. Swanell when she was dying. I have found—young Ransom was with me—a parcel of female clothing hidden in the hollow old tree at Oak Dip in the Park.”

Grant never stirred. No sound came from him. But he turned white—terribly white.

“Now I must tell you,” Ned went on, “I have thought from the first my brother was murdered.”

Grant stood looking across the table. His keen strong-glancing eyes were fixed on Ned’s face. Attentively, warily. Only his abiding and almost appalling loss of colour showed how much he was moved.

“Have you any objection,” said Ned, more embarrassed by the other man’s silence and manner than he would have thought possible beforehand—“to telling me how you were occupied on the morning of the fifteenth of April last, between the time after your short stay at the Cotterell sale and the time when Maurice Ransom ran to your house and was told you had only just returned?”

“Every objection,” said Grant. He drew a long breath which seemed to ease him. A faint

shade of his natural colour returned. "What right have *you* to cross-examine me?"

"I think I have a right," said Ned fiercely. "So much so that I'll ask another question. How did you feel when reading Dante with my cousin Miss Busshe you came in the description of Hell on this passage:

Fix thine eyes beneath; the river of BLOOD
Approaches in the which, all those are steep
Who have by violence injured!

And later Dante says how the Centaurs were

Aiming shafts
At whatsoever spirit dares emerge
From out the BLOOD more than his guilt allows——

Grant closed his eyes. He said something to himself. Ned hated, as a rule, the sight of suffering. But he didn't mind seeing Grant suffer.

"I have a right to come forward," he went on, "not only as Julian Demmean's brother but as Miss Busshe's near relative. I am very deeply interested in my cousin. I propose to open her eyes to the true character of her *jealous* uncle."

Grant's teeth had been close set. They parted with a jerk. His face showed in rapid succession stupefaction; amazement; a flash as if of hope—it died out; he was silent a moment; looking fixedly down, then came round the table right up to Ned and said quickly and low:

“Man!—Man!—she did it. And God forgive us both for a damned pair of idiots, from the moment when Ransom told me you were out to spot the person who shot your brother I thought you suspected the truth and were hunting her down. She did it.”

“She?” Ned gasped; glared. “Who?”

“Eaglet — Emmy — Emily Busshe — your cousin. She did it.”

“Did what?”

“Shot him—shot your brother. Lord of Mercy look on us! Take it on myself? Impossible. She'd be up like a little lion.”

“You're mad,” Ned protested (while all the time a breaking voice cried out in him, it's true, it's true). “The slender girl. How could she handle a pistol?—shoot a man through the heart? Pinney said it was done by an expert.”

"I taught her to shoot," said Grant slowly, "when she was only thirteen. She begged me to."

Ned pulled out one of the chairs which were rammed under the table, sat down, leaned forward, his elbows on the table, his head between his hands.

Beside the chimney-piece hung an almanac. Benedicta Watkyn had given it to Grant at the new year. One of those which presents the figure of each day large on a single leaf; you tear a leaf off every morning.

Grant's eye lighted on the almanac. It was still at yesterday's date. He was nerving himself to ask the question on the answer to which Emmy's fate now appeared to hang. As if glad of the pretext for delay he went and tore a leaf off the almanac and threw it in the fire. Then returned. He leaned back with his hands behind him on the table.

"Have you got the bundle?"

"No."

"Where is it?"

"I sent Ransom with it to Gaywood, the detective-inspector at Kaye."

Actuated by an unaccountable and purely

mechanical instinct Grant walked back to the almanac, tore off another leaf, making the date to-morrow's, threw the leaf in the fire. He came back and resumed his former place and attitude.

"Was there a handkerchief," he said, "with her name embroidered on it in full? 'Emily H. Busshe?'"

"What is her second name?" said Ned. As if that was something very important.

"Hegel."

"No. There was no handkerchief. Not a handkerchief. No."

"But did you thoroughly overhaul the contents of the bundle?"

"Yes. Ransom and I did. And Ransom's sharp. There was no pocket in the dress. Nothing in the bag but a purse with a pound note in it and a shilling. A pair of gloves. No handkerchief. No handkerchief."

"Then there's good hope yet," Grant exclaimed. Light came into his face.

As a child Ned had read a tale of two men, fellow-passengers for South America, who on board ship had a bitter quarrel. They agreed to fight it out on arrival; meanwhile they didn't

speak. Their ship took fire and the end of it was the deadly enemies found themselves alone together on a small island—the island of a young boy's tale book.

Back to Ned as he sat here came the old description of the hating couple standing staring out to sea; desolate, all was desolate; they saw bits of wreckage bobbing about; and turning to each other uttered at the same moment the same word, "Gone."

For him too there had been a wreck. He seemed to be looking out at a desolate sea; his hostility towards Grant was swallowed up with much else. And as with those castaways on the island, was not an alliance forced now on the two men who loved Emmy? The castaways were brought together by their interests; he and Grant by Emmy's.

Chapter XVIII

GRANT drew his chair closer. He spoke; his voice had tone; yet not a word could have been heard half a yard off.

“I did get away from the sale at Cotterell quite early,” he said. “Coming home I took the cut by the lambing-fields. No one knew when I came back. Your brother had been unreasonably put out by his failures in our before-breakfast match. He had always concealed his superstition about pistols from me. But it came out then. He said he had an unlucky one. I thought I would propose a second match, exchanging pistols. I went through into the Como garden from my own and up to the open French window of the study, I saw at once your brother lying dead. You know of course that he was extraordinary sensitive to heat. Though the warmth of that day was only spring warmth he had on in the house a white linen suit, the loose jacket was open, there was blood on his shirt.

(So long had Grant carried these things in his mind, ever, ever consciously there, dammed-up; that now an opening was made they came forth, not with any hurry indeed, but unhesitatingly, as if by a self-working process.)

“I went in and there I saw a person I didn’t recognize—a woman. She was raising herself from the floor as if coming out of a swoon. She spoke and I knew it was Emmy. She said, ‘I’ve shot him. I’ve killed him. He’s dead.’

“Emmy is a clever actress. First-rate at impersonations — mystifications. I’ve never cared about her doing it. But the child has had so few amusements. On the fifteenth, when she had ruled that she and your brother were not to meet, she took it into her head to visit him in disguise. It was a bit of mad fun planned by a young girl half beside herself with happiness. She got Rose Swanell to help her. Rose had had some clothes and other articles left her by a relation of her father’s, a retired dressmaker living at Newhaven. From among these clothes they selected the things you saw. The make-up was Emmy’s work entirely. She is an artist at it. She wrote a feigned name on

a card, she assumed the character of a new under-matron from the Orphan Girls' Home at Kaye. She and Julian had visited this Home together. She pretended to be collecting money for a grand piano for the girls' concerts.

"She was perfectly successful. Your brother gave her a guinea, then was evidently in a hurry to get rid of her. He showed her out himself at the front-door.

"Emmy hadn't gone far along the road when her spirits failed her. The joke no longer seemed a joke. She couldn't endure having been dismissed. You know she is impulsive. She returned, went round the back way and wandered down the garden. She hoped to find your brother there. She was shy, she said, of going to the study. It came to that, however. She made her way up to the house, trying to whip herself up into the comic vein—to think how she would break in on Julian and triumphantly laugh at him. Still, she felt miserable. The study was empty. On the secretaire lay a letter addressed to herself. The sight of it revived her. As he wasn't to see her Julian had been writing. She seized on

the letter. He wrote, breaking with her—it was to have been delivered early the next morning. Pardon me—it was a wretched letter. I read it. Short. That was its one merit. Your brother announced to Emmy that he was leaving England with a woman who was all the world to him—a married person. He gave no name. Probably it was some one he had known before he knew Emmy. Pardon me again—there wasn't a sign of decent feeling in the composition. Where apology was intended—only insult was achieved. A fatality in the nature. Emmy had the letter in her hand when Julian came down into the study from his room above. She made herself known. She reproached him with only one thing—the baseness of having gone on behaving to her as an ardent lover after deciding to leave her. He had seemed at first stunned by his surprise. But when she said that, he smiled. A nervous smile, I think. Involuntary.

“Emmy couldn't reason like that. She said, on his smiling, her blood surged up in her head; behind her eyes; she saw Julian's pistol lying handy—caught it up—fired—and fell fainting.”

Ned started up; a heavy oath was choked in his dry throat; he thrust his hands in his trouser pockets; he moved his feet as if they needed steadying.

“Poor angel! Poor darling!”

The old-fashioned soberly appointed dining-room, with its curious personal air of honourable pride, suddenly became urgently visible. And so did, through a dusk-gathering window, the blackness of drenched garden-trees. Leaning against the mantel-piece he wished he hadn't given way like that. Then he noticed that Grant was staring as if at something slightly removed, something he alone saw. He seemed absorbed. Ned hoped his outbreak had passed unobserved. He slipped back to his chair. Grant went on:

“Of course, the first thing I did was to examine your poor brother's body. He had been dead some time. Pinney said death was instantaneous. The revolver lay near his hand. Emmy, the instant she had fired, before losing consciousness, must have thrown it from her in horror. It was the position of the revolver suggested to me the possibility of saving her from the results of an act which in my opinion

she did *not* commit. It was one instant's madness. I saw how well the death might be taken for suicide. I never touched the revolver, simply left it where it was. I burned your brother's letter and Emmy's card. All this while the dreadful figure—Emmy and not Emmy—sat by shivering, watching with blank looks. After the first outcry she said nothing.

“The storm began. I took advantage of it. Concealed under the large umbrella out of the hall I got Emmy back to the Swanell cottage. The road was swept clear, we didn't meet a soul. I was obliged to take Rose Swanell into my confidence. A brain and a heart there. She dearly loves Emmy.

“When Emmy's faculties came back she was wild to give herself up to the police. I tried to convince her from my own fixed conviction that she wasn't morally responsible for the act. That argument failed. But when I told her that if she did as she wished her father would never survive it, she gave way. ‘I mustn't kill two men,’ she said.

“Rose thought her mother was out. But Leah was asleep in her own room. Emmy's disguise was taken off and the things were

rolled up in a bundle. Rose meant to burn it at night. As the storm subsided I had to leave Emmy in her charge, I was afraid of being seen. I went home, let myself in at the front-door and the servants naturally supposed I came straight from Cotterell. Rose got Emmy dressed, the child showed great courage, said she would take the secrecy as part of her punishment. When the storm was over Rose went with her to the gate of Fir Bank. She watched her in and at the basement door saw her fall. A servant girl screamed the news of your brother's death through the house from the opposite door and it was too much for Emmy. Rose ran to help. She was about twenty minutes gone. Meanwhile Leah Swanell came out of her room, went to Rose's room to look for her and found and removed the bundle. She hid it on the premises at first, but Rose never knew where. In her despair she told the old woman that she couldn't do a worse turn to the man to whom she owed her bread—myself—than to let the bundle get into strange hands. Leah was obstinate.

“Later she must have taken her find round to Oak Dip. Where it would apparently have

rotted unthought of, unseen, but for Leah hearing that I had been made a magistrate. That turned her vague perversity into active malice. Leah *knew* nothing. She had only suspicion and imagination to prompt her.

“The woman your brother had arranged to go away with has never made a sign.

“About the handkerchief. It was one of a dozen Miss Watkyn embroidered years ago. Who else would have put the full name? Emmy thought that having half—only half—recovered her senses she tried to wipe away the blood on the shirt with this handkerchief. Then, seeing someone coming up the garden (myself) it seemed to her she remembered thrusting the handkerchief away. A surface instinct of concealment. She said she believed the dress had no pocket, but she was afraid she hid the handkerchief up a sleeve. I was a fool to ask if you had found it. Of course, if you had—your eyes must have been opened. I’m inclined to think she was under a delusion about it, dreamt that detail, perhaps, while she lay ill in bed. Rose Swanell believes she had no handkerchief on her when she left All

Saints' Alley. And without the handkerchief the bundle incriminates no one."

There was a silence before Ned said, "Was the second pistol yours?"

"No. Your brother must have fetched it from the cabinet."

"I don't understand about the *two* reports that were heard. It was supposed that poor Julian sent a bullet through the eyes of Wellington's portrait before shooting himself. But—things being as they were—there must have been in reality only one shot."

"Yes. Who heard the *two* shots? Robert Smith, the deaf old jobbing gardener. Deaf people when they do hear a loud sound sometimes get it doubled. It's the unusualness of the sensation gives the nervous system a twist. Mrs. Grove could only swear to one shot. There might have been two, she said. She hadn't her full faculties. My idea is that the damage was done to the portrait before your brother had his breakfast. He came in red-hot with his vexation—you can't conceive how vexed he was—when one thinks of the business he had in his mind that morning it seems incredible—but——"

Ned interrupted. "I understand perfectly," he said. "Julian all over."

"Well then, you see, he got a second pistol from the cabinet and wreaked his ill-temper on the portrait he objected to. Either Peggy Grove and Hinchley were both at the moment out of hearing or if the shot was heard we were taken to be still amusing ourselves."

"Emmy, I suppose, didn't notice anything about the portrait——"

"I asked her that. No. She said she wouldn't have known whether there were pictures on the walls or not."

"The key——"

"Coincidence? After all, keys do get lost."

"And Gaywood was wrong about the magnolia."

"Obviously."

"He's pigheaded. He wouldn't entertain any idea that failed to take in as an item descent by means of the magnolia."

"The police are like that. They make up their minds on one detail and turn it into a centre. But Gaywood's mistake is our gain."

Ned sighed as he nodded. The next thing

he had to say was already in his mind. It came out in a minute. "I knew about my brother's intention," he said. And he spoke of the much-wandering letter. He guarded Coral Ransom's name. Easily; for on that point Grant was incurious.

"Well," he said, as if winding up the whole matter, "you weren't altogether wrong, you see, in fixing your suspicions on me. My part at the inquest was easy. I had only to play second fiddle to Pinney. No false statement was necessary. But I am, of course, an accessory after the fact."

"If you've committed a crime," said Ned eagerly, "all I know is in your place I should have done the same."

"The question is not—was it a crime?—but to quote the First Napoleon—was it worse than a crime? A blunder."

He bent his eyes before him with a haggard concentrated look. "Supposing——" he began; but at the same moment Ned had opened his mouth. "Let us hope that——" came from it. Each man stopped to let the other speak. Then Grant gave a sort of laugh and a rest-

less toss of the head. "Hope!" he said. "That's the word. Hope! That's the thing."

He seemed to succeed in banishing the evil-boding thought that had troubled him. "I'd like to know one thing, Captain Demmean," he said quickly. "There is an idea in the air at Fir Bank of wintering in Italy. It must be acted on at once. The discovery at Oak Dip is bound to reach Emmy's ears sooner or later if she remains in the neighbourhood. I don't wish that. I shall try to get the family off early next week. Show them Florence and Rome and settle at some health resort for the winter. The cheapest are the best. You aren't very fit. Join us. When it suits you. Either before the sight-seeing or after."

Ned felt the generosity of the proposal.

"I should like to see Florence and Rome," he muttered. "Thanks."

Grant rose, stretching himself. "Do we meet at Fir Bank to-night?"

"It's my night."

"Chess," said Grant. An irony melancholy yet indulgent was in his tone.

Like a priest in a burning city who thinks

only of his church, Ned, as soon as he was alone, had but one question in his mind. Does this cut me off definitely from Emmy? He answered himself thus:

No. If I can bring her to feel for me the half of what I feel for her the past is past and the future is ours. That's clear, surely.

Grant deserves her, in a way, more than I do. But is it likely a girl would ever *love—love*—a man she's always regarded as an uncle? A girl who knows what love is, too. Pinney said it was impossible. Grant is a fine chap. Dictatorial though. Does a girl want that in her husband? I'm richer than he is. Could give her a fuller life. She'd never think of that, but it does make a difference.

And Grant eating his usual plain dinner thinks to himself *Jealous* uncle. *Hm*. How the devil did Edward Demmean read my secret?

For it had not long been clear to Grant himself. Even now he was certain that he had looked coolly on Emmy's marriage only because he was doubtful about Julian Demmean. The calamity, and what followed the calamity, had done it. Being all in all to her. Ned Dem-

mean's ejaculation comes suddenly back to him, "Poor angel! Poor darling!"

No. Emmy isn't an angel. Not the angel type. Her mother was that. This young man's all right. Reliable and affectionate. It is far too early for Emmy to form a new attachment yet—(here, John Grant, you show less perspicacity than usual, for as a rule the woman agonized by a love-loss either dies or soon needs fresh love)—but when she does—I am forty. By that time shall be forty-one; perhaps forty-two.

I'll draw out my Emergency Fund at any rate and surround her with Paradise in Italy. Yes, I can have that pleasure. As for the rest, *Che sara sara*.

And the self-trained stoic tries hard not to feel the thin little hand of his idol at his lips—and fails.

A word here. Grant as well as Busshe had loved Emmy's mother. The girl of seventeen chose of the two very young men the one who looked like a Greek sculptor's dream of a demigod. And was about as fit for matrimony as if he had been no more. Did she find out her

mistake? Possibly. Anyhow, before she died she said to Grant, "You will look after Frank and his Eaglet for me." He replied, "I will."

This explains much in Grant's life that puzzled outsiders.

Chapter XIX

THE late evening is rainless, moonless, starless, almost airless. A river mist hides the feeble street lights. Smothered, like the secret drama which has its root in Julian Demmean's death, lie the places we know, the scenes of the drama; Como, the long open-faced house with the cheerful windows and road-fronting flower borders; Rufus Lodge squarely withdrawn behind its trees; the perky little All Saints' Studio villa snuggling up alongside of the new hotel and staring across at Dangerous Corner; All Saints' Alley, whose bright trailing dying bowers and last smelly crops close in the cottage where Leah Swannell's dead body lies; Fir Bank, old, old, bulgy, fantastic, shallow, in its strip off the Park—all these under the wavering mist-blanket are as if they were not. From one ten minutes to another the tram-lights, faintly visible, hasten by.

Ned Demmean comes up to Fir Bank gate

just after Grant, who has his key in the door. They enter together. After a moment's cogitation Grant leads the way to the drawing-room.

The door stood open. A quiet picture was there. The faded, refined look of the room, the open piano with a song on the music-desk, the rich French screen, the Indian inlaid chess-table, red chrysanthemums reflected in the mantel-glass; and amid this old familiar still life, as still, sat Emmy on the sofa. Dr. Pinney was beside her, talking for two to his pet baby. He called all the people he had brought into the world his babies. So strong was the suggestion in the scene of settled safety and homely peace that as John Grant and Edward Demmean stood a moment to gaze, it made their griping anxieties appear like a bad dream.

Emmy rose.

"Dad's poorly," she said. "He didn't sleep last night. And all day he's had extraordinary sensations."

"It's nothing," Pinney assured them. "*She* came to fetch me. Got nervous without her aunt. I prescribed a mutton cutlet, sliced tomato with cayenne and" (he looked at Grant)

“a good glass of the port you sent up from your father’s cellars a while back. I know that port. Now the patient is digesting, instead of one of his patent messes, real food. What a feat!—eh? I waited to keep the little girl company till her friends came.”

Pinney was in high spirits. A cranky female who, thinking he didn’t understand her, insisted on being escorted to a specialist had this morning parted with ten guineas only to hear that Dr. Pinney was right on every point. Great fun for Pinney! Grant liked his cheerfulness. Ned could only gloomily wonder how, knowing what he now knew, he was to throw dust in the dear old chap’s shrewd eyes. By hook or by crook it must be done.

Pinney was delighted too to see Grant and Ned Dimmean arrive at Fir Bank together; obviously on quite good terms. Ned was a sane man again then. At least as sane as a man in love can be. What if he had been mistaken on the other point also? Grant enamoured? Pinney found it almost as difficult to imagine him sighing for Emmy Busshe as shooting Julian Demmean. No, the doctor

inclined just now to see a bright look-out all round. And he loved bright look-outs.

He strolled to the open piano. The song on the desk was in manuscript. The music was Greek to Pinney. But he saw that the words were in Grant's handwriting and felt curious. As he took the song up he noticed that there was silence in the room. Forthwith he began to spout:

As the dark sky looks for dawn
I look for you;
As the hind follows her beauteous fawn
I follow you.
My holy places are
Where'er your light feet bear you,
Yea, if I were a star
I'd fall to get near you.

As a wave waits on the moon,
I wait on you
As a bee has joy in the July noon;
So I in you——

Here the doctor broke off. "Hullo, Jack Grant!" he called out—"are you reponsible for all this syrup?"

He had been a young man coming about the house at Rufus Lodge when its present

owner was a little boy; life had separated them, however; and with good will on both sides and surface familiarity they were not intimate.

Grant was standing on the hearth-rug. His long, muscular form and firm features had at that moment something about them which certainly contrasted oddly with the images in the song; something positive, uncompromising, unassailable. He threw towards Pinney an ironical, one-sided smile. "No," he said. "I came across the words in an old magazine. The jingle fitted with an air that was bothering my head, so I made the mixture and presented it to Emmy."

Grant did compose occasionally. Publish? Never. "At the same time, doctor," he went on, "don't you know that old bachelors and old maids are the most sentimental people on the face of the earth?"

Pinney didn't answer, he was going on reading—to himself; for Emmy and Ned had got into talk. It was Ned who began it. "I've never heard you sing or play," he said to his cousin.

"I'm not good," she said. "Only splendidly taught."

"Who taught you?"

"Mr. Grant."

"Won't you sing this song of his?" Ned ventured.

She slightly shook her head.

"Won't *you* sing it?" Pinney addressed Grant.

"I would if I had a voice," he said.

"Hasn't he?" Pinney looked at Emmy.

"No," she said. "A divine croak."

"Ask him to divinely croak," urged the doctor.

"But I want to peep at dad," she said; and with an abrupt movement, charming in its gaucherie, was gone.

"Is he in bed?" Grant enquired of Pinney; who nodded. Ned went close up to Grant. "Wouldn't it be a good thing to get Pinney on your side about Italy?" he said in a low voice.

The idea of his requiring assistance rather amused Grant. "We'll move Frank all right," he said indulgently.

Pinney took out his pipe. "Must trot."

There were no electric fittings at Fir Bank. The old-fashioned hall-door bell rang vio-

lently. Grant turned round sharp. He was reminded of Maurice Ransom's ring when the young man rushed round from Como to Rufus Lodge on the morning of the fifteenth of April. And it was Maurice who the next minute entered the room. Again did his aspect announce disaster. He was less agitated, more active, than on the other occasion; but Grant and Ned Demmean took from his appearance a shock so severe they were prepared, when he spoke, to hear the worst.

Maurice hesitated for a second with his eyes doubtfully on Pinney. "We are all friends here, Ransom," said Grant.

Maurice evidently scarcely knew whether to address Miss Busshe's cousin or her titular uncle. His head kept turning from right to left as he said, "I hoped to find one of you here, if not both. How could I have spoken to Mr. Busshe? The first time Gaywood examined the contents of the bundle he got no clue. But he has tried again and found a pocket in the wadding of the petticoat. There was a handkerchief in it stained with blood and marked in full with Miss Busshe's name. Don't ask how I know. Some one in humble life

who Miss Busshe was once very kind to come and told me, hoping to save her. Unless," here he fixed his jumpy glance on Grant, "unless the handkerchief can be explained away there's not a moment to lose."

Maurice had already read in the face, so well known to him, of Ned Demmean the fact that it *was* Miss Busshe who had done the deed. Grant was impenetrable. "Your car, Captain Demmean, can be round in five minutes," Maurice went on, gesticulating as he never did in ordinary life—he had cured himself of the tendency, Coral thought it common. "Bury her in London for a week or so; then make for one of the obscure sea-ports. Miss Busshe is in, I trust."

What? Emmy? Emmy Busshe! What's this tomfoolery?" The words were from Pinney. He was close to Grant who, touching the back of his hand, gave him a look terrible in its decisiveness. Pinney staggered—stepped back into a chair. He felt at that moment what he seldom felt. Old.

The door opened and Emmy appeared at it with the lovely smile of a satisfied mother. "He's off like a baby," she cried.

The four men faced her, or rather, failed to face her as if it were they who were guilty. She noticed Ransom's presence, which she hadn't done at first; simultaneously something in the very air seemed to strike home and tell her of the errand he came on.

"The parcel is found," she said quickly. "The handkerchief is in it."

It was Ransom who answered. "Yes, Miss Busshe. And——"

She stopped him, holding up a hand. She looked straight at Grant. "The end!" she said. She turned to Ned. "I'm glad you know."

What he had feared seemed to be happening. She spoke to him as if she was a ghost. "Emmy! Emmy!" He got out her name. Then could go on. "It was a fatality." He made an unsuccessful attempt to seize her hand. "*You* are my first thought." He began passionately urging her to escape. Ransom seconded him. "No," she said, "I kept the secret for my father's sake. *He must* know now. So let it all come!"

Grant stood quiescent; it seemed strange.

The door-bell rang again. "That's Gaywood," he said.

Ruth, the housemaid, showed her puzzled face. "Mr. Gaywood asks to see Miss Busshe," she said.

Grant looked at Emmy for the first time. "My child, I ask you to go to your room for a quarter of an hour." He addressed her as child and like a child she went.

"Where is Mr. Gaywood?"

"I showed him in the dining-room, sir."

Grant nodded. "I must see him alone," he said, with a glance over his shoulder at the three other men; and left the room.

He was allowed to take everything on himself. Only Edward Demmean could have had any right to interfere. And Ned was crushed to the earth. *He* had dragged the parcel into the light of day; *he* had forwarded it to the police. "I'm the founder of the feast." These were the words which ridiculously enough sang in his head. When Grant had left the room he spoke aloud. "I'm the founder of the feast," he almost shouted. A short laugh rattled in his throat.

Pinney jumped up. He was himself again

and very sorry for Ned. "It was a fatality," he said; giving the young man back his own words. He got Ned by the arm, forced him to sit down and sat by him, and Ned found a certain relief in answering his questions; meanwhile Maurice took himself off.

He liked Emmy Busshe, but it was not for her sake alone that he came to Fir Bank. To keep the secret of his wife's abortive connection with Julian Demmean was a fixed idea with him. When he heard that Miss Busshe was suspected of murder he said to himself, "If the poor girl is guilty; if she is arrested, imprisoned, tried—all must come out." Hence his exceeding anxiety.

Helpless now, he disconsolately returned home through the mist. Looked for Coral. Went to Hilda, the maid, who told him Mrs. Ransom had gone out. He was uneasy. Did Hilda know where her mistress had gone? "No, Mrs. Ransom only said she might be late for supper."

The truth was Maurice had passed his wife between Fir Bank and their own house. But it was no night for recognitions; and though she, with her woman's sixth sense knew him,

she had had for Maurice no more identity than outline. A moving blot.

Why was Grant determined to see Gaywood alone?

Well, often as he had considered the possibility of this moment's coming he found himself, when it came, hit too hard to think clearly; yet he couldn't at once accept as a fact the hopelessness of the situation. What he felt was—*Can't* she be saved?—but I must shut off Edward Demmean; his face is a placard.

Gaywood and Grant were well acquainted. But in public rather than private. And when Grant went into the dining-room at Fir Bank where the Kaye detective-inspector sat waiting he took with him his public official face. A stern shut-up phiz it was.

Gaywood is a middle-sized man just under or just over forty, a little too stout and beginning to be bald; a reddish face; the heavy jaws are balanced by a good forehead; the turned up nose is large but not coarse; the mouth is stubborn; the small grey eyes move slowly.

For the rest he is not a wonder either of talent or stupidity; has his bright moments and his dull moments; a conceited, obstinate per-

son; kind-hearted. He is a widower with two children.

Grant is not popular with his brother magistrates; but Gaywood has an immense respect for him. He thinks that Mr. Grant's abilities compare less unfavourably with his own than is the case with most people.

Favoured by the misty night, the Kaye detective-inspector has very unostentatiously taken measures which render it impossible for anyone to leave Fir Bank unobserved. And he knows Miss Busshe to be at home. He is in no hurry.

Formally the two men greet each other. Gaywood begins saying what he has to say. Suddenly, at a glance as it were, Grant sees how, from a lawyer's point of view, the case might be fought by Emmy's friends. He knows that Rose Swanell does fine washing occasionally for Fir Bank. Her crazy old mother might well have stolen the handkerchief and given it to her gipsy pal, the man unknown who going to Como to rob had been alarmed into murder. Or——

Fool! What do these brain-wanderings signify? Emmy will plead guilty. Plead?

No. She will never live to be tried. The bruised reed will break.

A sound in unconscious unison with which he has had these thoughts ceases and they cease with it. The subdued tones of Gaywood's naturally sonorous voice have been in Grant's ears—for how long? That he could not tell you; his brain was working too busily; nor has he taken in a single word.

Aghast at the discovery in himself of such an unwonted lapse he fixes on Gaywood a glance which is searching and severe. The severity is really aimed at his own wool-gathering; the searchingness expresses a desperate effort to guess what Gaywood has been saying.

For the third time the old hall-door bell rings loud. The jangle has a new character. It is jerkier and more imperious. Ten to one the person now at the door is a woman.

Grant and Gaywood both turn round, forgetting each other, instinctively waiting to learn what this signal portends. Grant does more than wait. He opens the dining-room door and goes into the hall where he finds Ruth just admitting Coral Ransom. Behind

her steps with an authoritative air the Rev. Ludovic Sim.

In the little hall Coral was right upon Grant almost as soon as he showed himself. Ruth had vanished. Coral said at once in a half-whisper, "Don't be surprised, Mr. Grant. I had to come. I know why Mr. Gaywood is here." Her eyes had travelled past Grant to the inspector, who was standing in the dining-room doorway.

Gaywood knew Mrs. Ransom by sight. Only by sight. Yet in a manner well—vastly well. His admiration for her was both discriminating and enthusiastic. Needless to say, he kept it to himself.

Quite startled by the unlooked for appearance at this moment of the figure which embodied the highest idea he could form of woman, he was staring at her in involuntary absorption when her words roused his business sense.

He came forward. "You know why I am here, Mrs. Ransom?" he said deferentially but decidedly. "May I ask *how* you know?"

"You will hear that, with the rest, in its proper place," she replied; composed; perhaps

a trifle proud. But she didn't omit to give Gaywood a quick glance which said—Your personality interests me. He felt it and was inly charmed.

Coral looked at Grant. "I have an important statement to make," she said.

"Indeed!" said Grant.

Something about her suggested to him the idea that her disclosure, whatever it might be, would favour Emmy.

"Indeed!" he repeated in a far less dry tone.

"Mr. Sim, coming to see Mr. Busshe, got to the door with me. I asked him to help. He can corroborate me on one point."

"A priest must go where he's wanted," said Sim with his chin in the air, "But if I'm *not* wanted, Mr. Grant—"

Grant held out his hand. There was a simplicity in the movement which, coming from him, rather touched the vicar of All Saints'. His grip was hearty.

Where the stairs terminated Grant leaned against the wall with the extreme end of the forefinger of his left hand as if viciously trapped between his teeth. Coral saw that for once he was uncertain what to do next. She moved to his side. "Upstairs!" she whispered.

Chapter XX

ONE glance into Coral Ransom's mind. From her bedroom, where she was freshening herself up for supper, she had heard Maurice let some one out of the house. The next moment he was with her, strugglingly exchanging his striped studio-coat for a black one. "What is it?" she said. "The Como case—Mr. Demmean—deadly evidence turned up against Miss Busshe—I am off to Fir Bank." He was gone.

If I go—if I speak—I lose Lady Alicia.

That this should be Coral's first thought may make you smile. But she had craved to rise, slaved to rise; her foot was on a low rung of the long, long ladder and Lady Alicia could (obviously soon would) with one touch float her up as high as she wanted to go. And certain it was that the woman who had meant to run away with Julian Demmean must cease to exist for Lady Alicia Lamely. Intellectu-

ally progressive, she was morally nothing if not stationary.

"I am on the Committees of two Societies for helping the fallen but I reserve my personal friendship for women I believe to be virtuous." Coral had heard her say that.

If I go—if I speak—I lose Lady Alicia.

Another thing. She couldn't confess that it was only Julian Demmean's position had attracted her. Lawless love would be forgiven her by people less strict than Lady Alicia; cool scheming in such a connection seemed monstrous. Plainly she saw that. She would have to pose as what she was not—the victim of passion.

With what bitter eyes, standing motionless, she stared through her front bedroom window at the corner-wall of the Como garden!

She made a sudden movement, indicative of resolution.

I must go—I must speak—I must lose Lady Alicia.

So here she was in the Fir Bank drawing-room, where she had never been before; Benedicta Watkyn, always civil now to Mrs. Ransom in public, not having got beyond that.

It must be remembered that Coral thought the fact of her having had an affair with Julian Demmean would come as a thunderclap to all the persons interested. Whereas Ned Demmean and Maurice Ransom knew all about it already. And did Coral shrink specially from the necessity she believed herself to be under of enlightening her husband—probably no later than this same night? Not she. No feature of the business occupied her less. She felt certain Maurice wouldn't give her a great deal of trouble.

Almost as they entered the drawing-room Gaywood said to her in a low voice, "Am I to understand, Mrs. Ransom, that you wish to make a statement in public?"

"If you call this public," she said, contentedly taking in the presence of Captain Demmean and Dr. Pinney—"yes." She spoke clearly, emphatically, as if wanting everybody to hear her. "I don't see anyone in this room who hasn't a near interest in what I have to say."

The impromptu session took on a sort of form. Thus:

Miss Watkyn being away, no one minded

draughts, and the screen was placed not as usual across the room, half dividing it, but on the same side of the room as the door, almost against the wall. Coral, with her unfailing eye for effect, seated herself with the screen for background; she had a dark antique-looking chair, unupholstered; beside it there happened to be a high painted stool; she took off her black hat and black huge neck-fur and laid them on the stool. The lustre of her hair and of the white neck above her black dress somehow gave this little action singular importance.

The men sat facing Coral in a scattered half-circle. Grant and Gaywood to one side; Ned Demmean and Pinney to the other. Sim's chair was farther back; he was almost behind Ned. Before they sat down Coral had found an instant in which to whisper to Grant, "Should Mr. Busshe be sent for?" Grant replied, "He's laid up." He was debating with himself now whether or not to fetch Emmy.

The question was settled for him. The door opened quickly and she came in. Perfectly collected.

The men rose. Emmy looked very young

and thin; the eyes too bright; the passionate mouth strongly set. Now you might see that Miss Watkyn wasn't talking rubbish when she said, as she often did, she was thankful Emmy had good blood on both sides, being a Watkyn and a Busshe. The girl appeared to remember only that in her aunt's absence she was mistress of the house. Moving from one point to another of the group, she shook hands first with Coral Ransom then with Mr. Sim and bowed to Gaywood, who was a complete stranger to her. All was so simply done!

She sat down near Grant; not very near.

Gaywood had been duly laconic and unemonstrative when addressing Mrs. Ransom. Nevertheless Coral somehow got at his feeling about her. And what a help it is to a woman on a critical occasion to have a thorough-going admirer present! Gaywood, being only a police officer, mightn't under other circumstances have counted for much; as things were he did count—considerably. Coral was quite eased and cheered by his smothered appreciation of her perfections. She began to get excited.

She looked on the irregular half-ring of

men; the young artillery officer with his bluntly modelled yet sensitive face, dark-tanned; the short, burly large-browed ecclesiastic, pope to many a soul in and around Daunt; John Grant, of whom she had several times thought, *That man is a man, I think I'd have chosen him for myself if women could choose*; Pinney, the neighbourhood's big medical light; Gaywood, representing Justice—terrible blind Justice; she looked on all these and they seemed (as an orchestra to a conductor) hers to move as she would; no matter for anything else; her personality asserted itself with reckless might; she must live these few minutes gloriously; she saw her rôle complete and it swallowed her up.

Leaning slightly forward in her chair after the break caused by Emmy's entrance, she said, "I expect to be believed." The voice was rich; there was melancholy in its tones and there was force. "Because in order to make the truth known I sacrifice——" she was going to say—my reputation—but stopped, thinking that clap-trappy; after the effective pause—"I make a big sacrifice," she said.

She straightened herself up and for one

minute sat like a statue except that the filmy black corsage heaved visibly.

“All the circumstances connected with Mr. Demmean’s death are not known,” she said slowly. “There was one which I am now bound to speak of. I never saw him till a month and a day before the day of his death. When we did meet he fell in love with me.”

A brief, oppressed interval. She seemed to be recovering from her effort.

A flash of comprehension passed across Grant’s silent visage; Sim gave a jerk in his chair; Gaywood stared, violently interested; Pinney folded his arms, retaining the judicial consultant’s look with which he had set himself to listen. In Emmy’s white face the two red spots appeared which came now with inward stress. Ned Demmean waited for Coral to go on. And she went on. “I felt so safe, I didn’t regard the matter seriously enough. Well! I am not here to tell my own story. On the night of the fourteenth of April last, Dr. and Mrs. Pinney of Elm Lodge, Daunt, gave a little dinner party and my husband and I went up there in the evening to help with some burlesque cinema acting. I gave way on

that evening; consented to go away with Mr. Demmean. He said he saw in me his predestined wife. He insisted on taking the step at once. I think I see now why. I begged for a few days' grace. He asked me to come up to Como the next day, in the morning, to settle details. He expected to be alone. I went. I had only been at Como once before with my husband.

“Mr. Demmean had given me a key which opens the gate from the end of Argyle Avenue into the lambing fields and the door from the lambing fields into the Como garden. I walked up the garden; he was in the study, as he appointed to be, with the French window open. He told me a person had just been with him from the Orphan Girls' Home at Kaye, begging. He wouldn't have had her in; but at the moment when her card was handed to him he was so deep in thinking out our plans he said, ‘Show her in,’ automatically. Suddenly we saw the person he was speaking of coming up the garden. I was terrified of being seen. I don't know why. A bad conscience, I suppose. Mr. Demmean was furious. He cursed and cursed her impudence. I saw for the first

time a woman's handkerchief on the floor and said, 'She's come back for her handkerchief.' Mr. Demmean opened a door, concealed in the wall where the bookshelves are; I didn't know it was there; he hurried me up the staircase to—to his room. We were there a few minutes."

Coral fetched a deep breath. Studied?—or was she thinking of the mad caresses Julian Demmean had heaped on her in the little room? He had almost frightened her, she had felt for a moment as if he were getting out of hand. How perceptible her heavy sigh was in the stillness! Not one of the persons listening to her stirred a finger, they were too profoundly taken up.

She put a hand to her head; dropped the hand; the voice raised itself again.

"I made him go down. After that the time seemed to me long; longer than it really was. I got impatient. I went down the stairs. Mr. Demmean hadn't quite closed the door into the study. I thought I heard a voice I knew—Miss Busshe's. I pushed the door the least bit more open and peeped.

Mr. Demmean and the elderly person we had

seen in the garden were standing opposite to each other and she was speaking in Miss Busshe's voice. As I looked she stopped speaking. Mr. Demmean smiled. It seemed to me a meaningless smile. She caught up his revolver which was lying on the secretaire. I knew Miss Basshe to be a splendid markswoman. She took aim and then—— Her hand flew up as if something gave it a knock, the bullet went high and passed through the eyes of the portrait of the Duke of Wellington hanging on the wall behind where Mr. Demmean stood.”

Emmy's hands which had been tightly clenched in her lap now covered her face. That was all. She didn't utter a sound.

“She fell down fainting,” said Coral, raising her head and speaking with a solemn sort of energy, “and Mr. Demmean picked up the revolver she had dropped, said aloud, ‘I knew all the time I should end like this,’ and shot himself——shot himself. It was all over in one instant. I was mad with the horror of it, I think; I fancied I heard people coming in by the front door, my husband and others. I offer no excuse for myself, my one idea was

to get away without being found out. I ran up to the little room again, the window was open, I got down, using the magnolia as a ladder," (here Gaywood's figure lunged forward in his chair, his fists heavily struck his knees) "I skirted the garden by a side-path, I had the key on me, I let myself out into the lambing fields. As I left them at Argyle Avenue Corner I saw Mr. Sim. He said 'Good-morning' and advised me to make haste home, a storm was due."

Here a physiological trick played itself off on Coral. The terrible sensation she had had when she saw Julian Demmean fall, recurred; it mastered her and suddenly the proud self-possessed woman seemed to turn into an agonized child.

"Oh, it was so awful! Oh, it was so awful!" she exclaimed in a loud, helpless voice. And began to cry, not gracefully as Coral usually cried; this was a genuine, piteous, but far from graceful blubbering. Deeply vexed would she have been if she could have foreseen the weakness.

Emmy's hands came down from her face. She crossed the room with a young girl's

indescribable flying motion; it was strange to see her take Coral's hat and fur off the stool; such a little everyday thing; she sat down on the stool and threw her arms round Coral's neck. "You are good, you are good," she whispered in her ear.

The men. Sim, a highly emotional person, swore. Pinney blew his nose. Ned Demmean leaned forward, every bit of him tense. Gaywood's teeth met and his lips went away from them. Only Grant showed nothing.

Coral quieted down. It cannot be said that up to now she had ever considered Emmy Busshe except as a factor in a state of things which mattered very much to Coral herself. But something about the girl impressed her now. Perhaps it was Emmy's piercing sincerity. "Well, Miss Busshe," she said, as she mopped up her face, "if you forgive me I don't care whether the public does or not."

She glanced at her male audience. They were more hers than before she had cried in that stupid, disfiguring way. She saw it and took heart. "I suppose I ought to have spoken at the time," she said meekly. "But for Miss Busshe's sake as well as my own it seemed best

not. The coroner's jury's verdict was right. It *was* suicide. So I argued why not leave it at that? It never struck me Miss Busshe would think it was *her* shot that had taken effect. I did do one thing. When I was ill with influenza I wrote to Mr. Sim enclosing a sealed letter which I asked him to keep and in case of my death at any time to read it and forward to Captain Demmean or Mr. Grant. In that letter is the whole truth just as I have told it."

"I have the sealed letter," trumpeted Sim. "And I remember meeting Mrs. Ransom on the morning of the fifteenth of April last at Argyle Corner. I thought she looked very ill."

It was Pinney's turn. With flushed face and swinging eyeglasses he was heard to say, "I speak as Miss Busshe's doctor. Her nerves are *kittle cattle*. The inhibitory movement of the real self followed almost immediately on a nerve paroxysm. I hold that there was *never* anything it would be correct to call murderous intention."

Emmy was still sitting on the high painted stool beside Coral Ransom. But she hardly seemed to be attending to what was going on,

When Pinney stopped speaking, however, she quickly raised her head. "Wrong, doctor dear," she said in a low but penetrating voice. "For one moment I meant—meant to kill him. When I came to myself in his study my first thought was, 'Oh Heaven, I meant to kill him. But I can't have done it. No, no, he's not dead.' He *was* dead and if I'd had a thousand lives all packed with splendid things I'd rather have given them for *his* life. Couldn't be done. See, doctor dear?" She pulled at the loose belt of her dress, a trick she had sometimes; as if helping herself forward. "I——" she began; then something seemed to give her a check; almost before anyone knew she had moved she was out of the room.

"I hold to my opinion," said Pinney.

"It was always mine," said Grant.

There was a minute's silence. Coral was trying to think if she had left anything out. "The second pistol," she said. "I forgot to say the very first thing Mr. Demmean told me when we met was that he'd had poor luck in a shooting match with Mr. Grant. Never shot so badly. He'd chosen out another of his pistols and wanted his revenge before evening.

It would fill up the time—the interminable time. I said he was no match for Mr. Grant. I never flattered him. I can't say I *saw* the other pistol, still that must have been the second one found in the study."

General assent.

Ned Demmean now stood up. "Mrs. Ransom has behaved bravely," he said. "She spoke of the harm her confession would do her. Is there any reason why anything that has been said this evening in this room should be repeated out-of-doors? We are gentlemen, I hope."

"I agree with Captain Demmean," answered Gaywood as he too got on his legs. "There is of course no material for a fresh case. As Mrs. Ransom has truly remarked, the coroner's jury were correct in their finding. May I compliment Mrs. Ransom on the very game and masterly way in which she has made her statement. And—one observation. *I* alone maintained at the time that whatever doubts might arise as to the other features of the tragedy, the magnolia had been descended by some one escaping through the window of the little room

above Mr. Demmean's study. I was *not* mistaken."

His chest swelled partly with self-satisfaction, partly because Coral smiled faintly, scarcely at Gaywood but towards him.

"You asked me how I knew why you came to Fir Bank this evening," she said. "Simply—from my husband."

Gaywood saw at once what had happened. He had got the middle-aged widow who looked after his house and children to help him in his second examination of the bundle. A woman, he thought, would know about a woman's clothes. It was she who found the concealed pocket. She had good reason to love Emily Hegel Busshe. As she knew it was Maurice Ransom who brought the bundle, to him in her distress she went. Yes; although Gaywood had bound her over to be dumb.

Somehow the Inspector didn't care to say he had been assisted by his housekeeper. What did it signify? In reply to Mrs. Ransom he merely bowed in silence.

Coral had a black satin bag hardly bigger than a purse attached to her waist. Her hand

went into this bag. She took a good-sized key out of it and said, looking at Grant, "Here is the key."

Grant went and took the key from her and handed it to Edward Demmean.

Chapter XXI

A FORTNIGHT later, at a little past ten p. m., Grant, sitting alone over a dying fire in the Fir Bank drawing-room, is taking himself to task.

An unpleasant occupation; nor does he look pleasant.

It has been a chess evening but he and Frank Busshe have played alone. Aunt Benny has conducted Emmy to one of those functions in connection with Mr. Sim's church which alone have power to call her forth after dinner. And knowing Emmy would be absent Ned Demmean didn't appear.

The Italian scheme is shelved. Emmy is learning to drive her cousin's car. The daily run has set her up.

Grant thinks—She is safe. Will eventually be happy. Is it possible, now the nightmare is over, that I ask for more than this?

His secret man by way of answer can only groan.

Francis Busshe has gone up to bed. Why doesn't Grant leave?

Listen! A voice and a laugh at the hall-door. Emmy's laugh. Ned Demmean's voice. Then—good night; good night.

Here come Aunt Benny and Emmy up the old-fashioned winding stair. The drawing-room door opens. Miss Watkyn, happy to feel that though other people may have grown lax about mourning, *she* is all black for her last aunt, shows herself. "Good night, Mr. Grant. I'm dead tired. Such an interesting evening."

Something like a spirit flashes by and the aunt calls out—"Aren't you going to wish Mr. Grant good night?"

No reply is vouchsafed; but Benny says amiably, "Emmy wishes you good night, Mr. Grant——" and goes up.

Grant had risen to salute Miss Watkyn. Instead of taking himself off, however, he lingered. He walked about the room. Finally sat down again. Miss Watkyn had left the door ajar. Suddenly it was pushed and Emmy dashed in.

Obviously she had begun to undress and then decided to come down. Her feet were

in loose bedroom slippers. Hair bustled up with two hairpins. Refastened in haste, her little old cream-coloured dress gaped in one place and bulged in another. By the by, Miss Watkyn had had to sell her niece's trousseau frocks at a huge loss and the girl paid for her determination never to wear them by going shabby.

Well, she stood a moment contemplating Grant's long figure stretched out in her father's armchair by the chess-table; his face hard-looking yet exhausted-looking, too. He glanced round. "It's late," he remarked.

"Frightfully late," she said scornfully—"for Fir Bank."

"What have you come down for?" he uncere-
moniously inquired.

The shut-up box with the men in it was on the chess-table. Emmy took the lid off and crashed the box down on the table; it was emptied with such force that a number of pieces went on the floor.

"I came to put the chess away," she said calmly. But she didn't start on the work she had created for herself. Grant smiled very slightly. Emmy seated herself on the high

painted stool which was at the opposite side of the fire to Grant's chair.

"The fire's out. You'll get cold in that thin dress," he said in a fatherly tone. She took no notice. Her face was burning. Her hands were burning.

"I'm glad God exists, anyhow," she said.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I can thank *Him* for all you were to me in—in the time of my tribulation. I can't thank *you*. Ice statue!"

Grant sat up. "What nonsense this is! Don't you see that I made a mistake?"

"What mistake?"

"If at the time I had let you do as you wished—as your right instinct prompted you—Maurice Ransom's wife would have come forward then and spared you six months of torture."

"I don't wish I hadn't had that torture." said Emmy proudly. "I deserved it." One of her feet in a white silk stocking came out of its slipper. "Besides; but for that——"

She broke off, looking across at him as if fiercely.

He said nothing.

"I'd never have known the depths of you but for that," she said.

Grant glanced at the little travelling clock on the chimney-piece.

"That clock's stopped," Emmy informed him. "Where's your watch?"

"Wants a new glass."

"No, those wonderful depths!" she went on musingly. "I have them to remember, at any rate. You're wooden enough now; yes; but _____"

"Wood, my child? I was ice just now."

"Sneer away!"

"What's the matter with you, Eaglet?"

At the sound of the name her bosom gave a heave.

She came and kneeled in front of the dead fire. Her eyes flashed round. "Why did you kiss my hand that morning?" she inquired.

Grant's face flushed up.

"Why?" he said; confounded.

"Yes; why?"

"Why?"

"Why? Why?"

Sorely put to it was the imperturbable Grant. "Why?" he said at last. "Why not?"

“Why not?—Do you say that?—Then, why not?”

She seized one of his hands, held it, covered it with kisses, dropped it, murmured with extraordinary rapidity while her own hands met under her chin in order to keep them from trembling—“You think in a year or two I shall marry Edward Demmean. I’ll never marry. Never. All that’s past and gone. Nor you either—never marry—will you? We’ll be always as we are now, see each other every day, tell everything, live on top of our depths as much as you like but go down into them together when there’s reason; we’ll be kind to everybody and care about each other so inexpressibly it’ll make us laugh—the mere thought of it—when we’re apart; such, such friends we’ll be. Let’s leave Daunt, Jack—I shan’t call you Uncle any more—see?—I want to live in the country, Jack; I love the country; especially where there are great green hedges; don’t you?”

“Eaglet, will you marry *me*? Not in a year or two; but now.”

She started back.

“I am close on forty-one,” he said roughly.

“In ten years you will be only twenty-nine, while I——”

“Arithmetic!” she cried; almost shrieked.

She sprang into his arms.

They did go into the country. One of the farming counties near the sea. Grant said unmixed happiness was a ludicrous thing; he must have something to be up against; so he bought a farm.

Ned Demmean suffered a good deal; but one day he met at a house where he was staying a girl with hair like Emmy's; while he was looking at her, trying to find a resemblance in the profile too she turned, their eyes met, she changed colour. The marriage is all right.

It is to be presumed that the Ransoms settled their little differences successfully; for ten months after the date of Coral's private-public confession in the Fir Bank drawing-room she had a lovely little girl. Lady Alicia Lamely is godmother to the infant, which is called Alicia, of course.

And Rose? She had been proud of her secret love for Grant as long as he was single. But when he married Emmy, Rose being a

specially good sailor took a post as stewardess on one of the great Atlantic liners. Like that she cured herself in a year and now John Grant the first seems a dream compared to John Grant the second whose nurse she is. He is a bottle baby and his mother declines to have anything to do with bottles; so young John is really more Rose's than Emmy's at present.

See her sitting in the night-nursery window, getting him off; she rocks slightly, singing low; below, on the gravel walk before the house, paces Emmy; it is July; hay-harvest over; Emmy is restless; she has still sometimes what she calls shadow days; days when the dark thing in her past barges into the present; and then she can scarcely bear her husband out of her sight. To-day he has had to be away five hours. Just as she has begun picturing a fatal accident with the car on the way home, he comes round the corner of the house. They meet and walk hand in hand.

"Listen to Rose," she says. "*I* never knew she could sing."

"Browne is very keen," says Grant; Browne being his right-hand man. "Has he any chance?"

“Oh, I’ll *make* her when baby’s older,” says Emmy. “Let’s go down and meet dad and Benny, they’re dining with us.”

They descend the beautiful careless old drive twisting down to the village between trees of many kinds which seem to have grown up there at random; like thoughts in a dreaming mind.

Suddenly Grant catches Emmy up; she is high in his arms; “Is Eaglet better?” he says, and kisses her eyes. She smiles, quite red. “Oh yes; well,” she replied; then hastily—“Put me down. They’re at the fork; I see Benny’s skirt, and she does think married love-making such tosh!”

“Does Benny?” says Grant, a good deal amused. He sets Emmy down with her feet on the mossy path, her head under tree-branches. “How sweet the lime-blossom smells!” she says.

Yes; how sweet, how sweet on a summer evening the lime-blossom smells of summer.

THE END.

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